AGE OF TV HEROES

JASON HOFIUS
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AGE OF

Contents

Introduction
This Production Brought to You by... 4

chapter 1 — **A Comic Book-to-TV Hero Timeline** 6

chapter 2 — **Superman / Lois & Clark** 24

chapter 3 — **Batman** 42

chapter 4 — **Shazam!** 60

Commercial Break One: TV Hero Movie Show Hosts 66

chapter 5 — **Wonder Woman** 70

chapter 6 — **Spider-Man** 88

chapter 7 — **Legends of the Superheroes** 106

chapter 8 — **Captain America** 112

TV HEROES

chapter

Doctor Strange 118

Commercial Break Two: Salute to the Super Heroes 120

The Incredible Hulk 132

Swamp Thing 144

Superboy / Smallville 150

Commercial Break Three: The Greatest American Hero 164

The Flash 172

Vampirella 183

The Tick 184

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Author Jason Hofius, with Spider-Man at the Eastwood Mall, Niles, Ohio. Summer of 1978.

Jason Hofius

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This production brought to you by...

introduction

Why exactly do I like this stuff? A fair question George and I hope to answer with our coverage of the shows in this book. I remember being a fan of television heroes before seeing any comic books. My first encounter with the fascinating world of costumed crimefighters came in the mid-seventies in our family's rural Pennsylvania trailer. We had a small color set where I saw reruns of *Adventures of Superman* and *Batman* along with *Shazam!* and *Spider-Man* as part of *The Electric Company* on PBS.

The sound of Superman whooshing through the air, the vibrant colors in the other shows and all the action kept me riveted—I wanted to see all I could. I soon discovered comics in a spinner rack at our local Kroger market and many of these heroes' books found their way into my eager hands. The comics were great fun and they opened my eyes to all the other heroes and heroines I never knew were out there. But as much as I loved them and the stories they told, the times I got new books were few and far between, while Superman, Batman and the rest were there for me on TV almost every day.

My introduction to TV heroes and comics probably would have been enough, but when I found Mego's line of World's Greatest Super-Hero dolls, that was it; I got hooked on heroes for a long, long time. It all came in a quick, concentrated time period. My friends and I were in a frenzy to keep up with everything, never wanting to be the last kid to discover the latest turn in the world of the super-powered. Much the same, I'm sure, can be said for countless children across the nation at the time.

In a time before the words dark, gritty and edgy were ever applied to superheroes, everything centered on adventure and the assurance of seeing the good guys defeat their enemies. With so many major heroes appearing on TV for the first time in the seventies, it was the perfect era to grow up as a fan. The stories they told were simple, but they delivered what mattered, and far above everything else, they were fun. Nothing in the ensuing years has been able to capture my enthusiasm like those regular fixes of flashy color and excitement.

The older shows certainly left their marks and did their jobs in keeping me interested whenever a new comic-based series starts. While the anticipation for the next episode (or movie, as has been the case lately) isn't there like it used to be, I do still get the feeling once in a while. I'm grateful for it, because it takes me back to the times when I would flip on my TV for the sheer enjoyment of it all.

George and I talked for hours about what we watched then and now, and why we like the things we do. Those talks led directly to the book you're now holding. We had an absolute blast contacting the people that put so many of our favorite shows, and memories, on the air. Thank you for taking the time to pick up the book. We hope it's as much fun to read as it was for George and me to research.

up up and away...

George Khoury

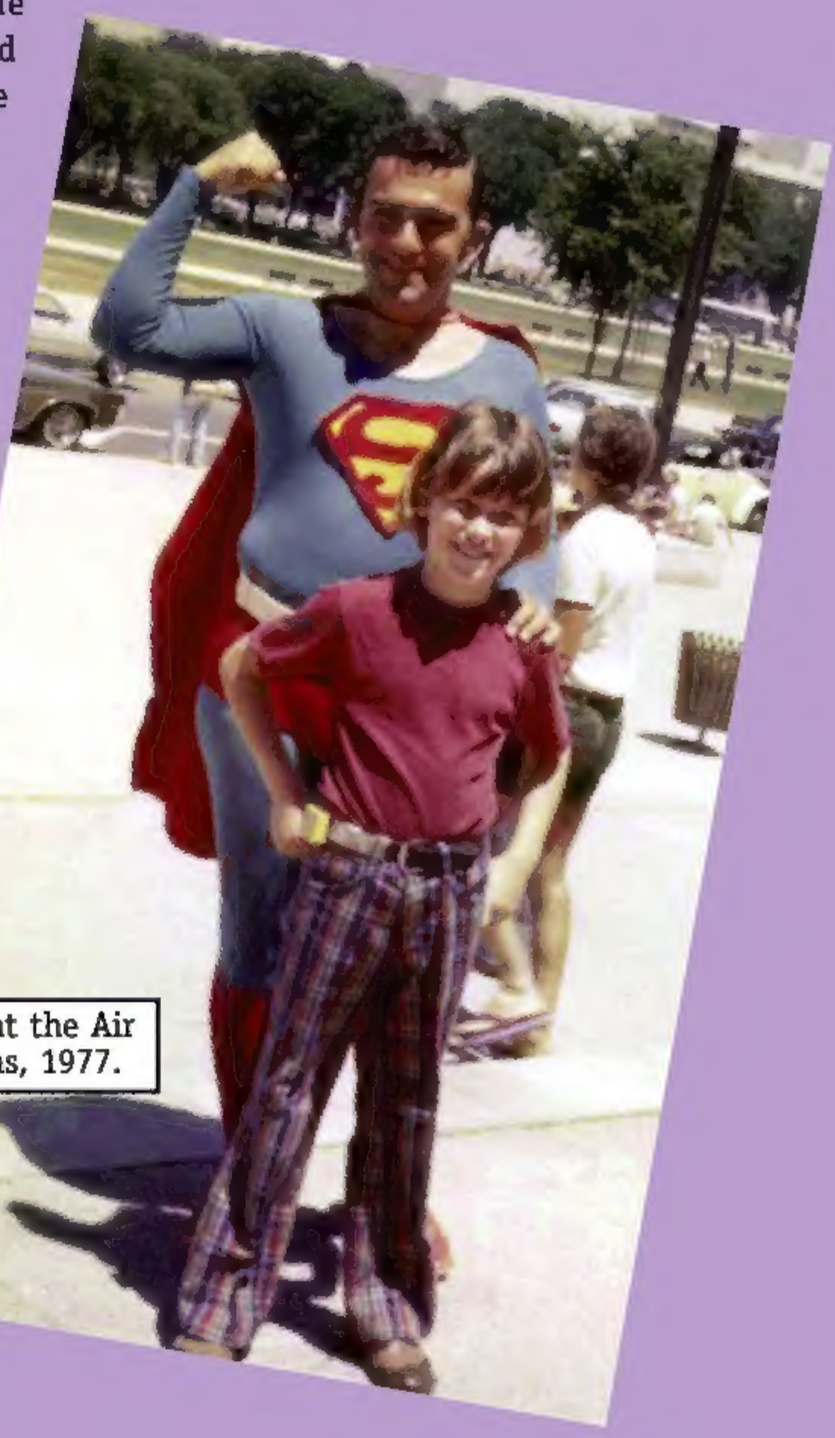
Author George Khoury in 1978 in New Jersey.

Dear friends, it's fair to say that if the superhero television programs showcased in this book didn't exist, our paths would have never crossed. Pop culture, itself, as we know today, would be immensely different. Without the imagination and colorful visions radiated from them, I shudder to think how bland our childhood and lives would have been.

The reason that these television heroes are so unforgettable is because they were the physical embodiment of comic book characters. The charm of these shows and their charismatic actors only made these endearing superheroes more believable and creditable, their bond with us tighter than today's big screen incarnations, created via CGI and countless millions of dollars. Think about it—the television superheroes paved the way for the surge of comic book-based movies and the superpower concepts that have entered today's mainstream consciousness. They've taken all of us along for the ride of a lifetime.

These heroes have been embraced by the world; their adventures have been translated into countless languages. The programs are continually watched on television and DVD by all generations, old and young. All of these universal accomplishments are only a testimony on their arresting grip. In these somewhat pessimistic times, the ability this genre has to cheer and thrill us is their greatest gift to all.

C'mon, wipe those blues and chores away for a minute. The gift to dream is true power and happiness—it can make the inconceivable be conceivable. So put it in top gear, and let your imagination soar with this book, my awesome superfriends!



Artist Alex Ross with Superman, at the Air and Space Museum, Houston, Texas, 1977.

and the cover...

chapter 1

A Comic Book-to-TV Hero Timeline

1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

When the comic book superhero first appeared in the late 1930s, a completely new genre in entertainment was born. Superman came first, then Batman, Captain Marvel, Captain America, Wonder Woman and scores of other early costumed crimefighters. The colorful characters and straightforward ways they dealt with evildoers made them immediately popular with young readers.

Similar heroic characters like The Lone Ranger, Zorro and Dick Tracy were already popular in radio, pulp novels and newspapers respectively, but it wasn't long before leading comic heroes made their way into the bigger spotlight. The exploits of Superman and Batman were adapted into all manner of media for public consumption, including radio shows and newspaper strips and even a series of striking animated theatrical shorts from Fleischer Studios for Superman.

Comic heroes made their first live-action appearances starting in 1941, with *The Adventures of Captain Marvel*, a theatrical chapter play series (now referred to as "serials") from Republic Pictures. *Batman* (1943 and 1949), *Captain America* (1944) and *Superman* (1948 and 1950) soon followed with popular theatrical chapter series of their own.

But after those efforts, it was time for the new phenomenon of television to pick up and build upon the superhero trend. From the time television was first generally available to families, superheroes, in one form or another, populated the airwaves to bring a little more excitement to young viewers' days. Whether flying, jumping, crawling, raging or just moving really, really fast, they've been on hand for over fifty years to help clean up the evil intentions of all from common street thugs to maniacs trying to take over the planet.

For this timeline, and indeed for the rest of the book, we are centering our coverage on heroes that had their roots in comic books. While we remain huge fans of characters like Buck Rogers, Flash Gordon and many others up to the current hit *Heroes*, we wanted to keep the scope of our coverage limited mainly to those super individuals who inspired our imaginations the most—the ones who came from comic books.

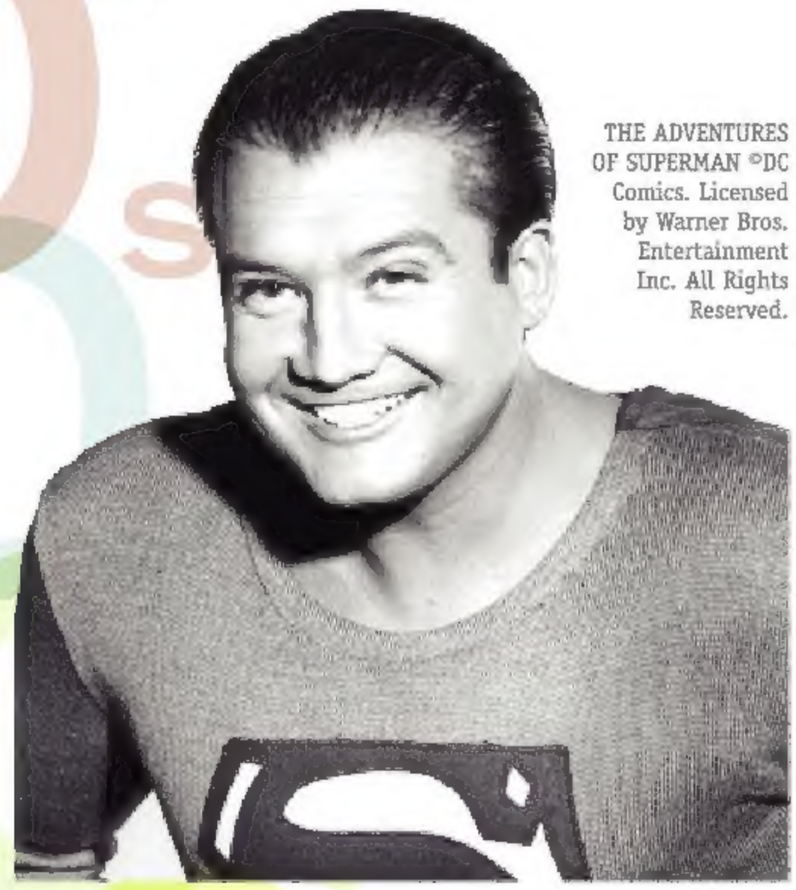
In this timeline we are presenting a very brief description of known titles that have been created for North American TV. Many of the shows in this section also have their own detailed entries later in the book. We have made note as to whether or not each title has been made available on home video, be that VHS, DVD or LaserDisc.

The 1950s

This decade saw many American families purchase their very first television sets. It was only fitting then, that the original comic book hero should also have the first comic-based weekly TV program. *Adventures of Superman* proved to be a long-lasting series that is still fondly remembered.

Adventures of Superman - 1952

The premiere comic book adaptation, ABC's *Adventures of Superman* starred George Reeves as Superman, while Phyllis Coates, and then Noel Neill, starred as Lois Lane. Lasting six seasons and becoming one of the first programs to be filmed in both black-and-white and then color, *Superman* was a tremendous hit and set a path for countless future comic book adaptations. The famous character created by Joe Shuster and Jerry Siegel would go on to star in three more major weekly television series. All six seasons of *Adventures of Superman* have been released on DVD. *Superman* is more fully covered in its own chapter, starting on page 24.



THE ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN ©DC Comics. Licensed by Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. All Rights Reserved.

The legendary George Reeves as TV's first Man of Steel.

Sheena, Queen of the Jungle - 1955

The character of Sheena is lauded as the first major female comic book heroine. Her comic series debuted in early 1942, slightly before the first appearance of Wonder Woman. This early Sheena television series by Nassour Studios was only the second live-action comic TV adaptation, following *Adventures of Superman*. But it did not prove as popular as the Man of Steel and lasted only a single season from 1955 to 1956. Chosen to play Sheena was magazine cover model and actress Irish McCalla. Another attempt to bring Sheena to life on television was undertaken in the year 2000. Episodes of this '50s version of *Sheena, Queen of the Jungle* have been released on various budget DVD labels.

Stunning Varga Girl model and actress, Irish McCalla made the perfect Sheena.

PILOTS
The Adventures of Superpup - 1958

A spin-off of Superman intended for the youngest crowd, this full-color episode incorporated live-action actors in giant, semi-animated dog head masks. The premise did not make it past the pilot stage. This very different production has been released as part of a fourteen-disc *Superman* DVD set.

Bark Bent (Billy Curtis) and Pamela Poodle (Ruth Delfino).

Bark Bent (Billy Curtis) at his desk at The Daily Planet.

The 1960s

This decade was nearly void of any televised comic book heroes, except for the iconic Batman series. Given the heavy shift in culture and attitudes over the course of the sixties, not to mention the changeover from black-and-white programming to full-color, it's surprising viewers weren't treated to many more comic book heroes and heroines.

The Caped Crusaders (Adam West and Burt Ward) in the thick of it again!

Yvonne Craig as the mysterious Batgirl, seen here in her pilot film.

Batman - 1966

The wildly popular *Batman* series was the first comic adaptation to be done completely in color. It lasted three seasons and due to airing several times a week, racked up a count of an amazing 120 episodes. *Batman* has not been commercially released on home video. *Batman* has its own expanded chapter, beginning on page 42.

PILOTS

The Adventures of Superboy - 1961

The first look at bringing Superboy to television came shortly after the end of *Adventures of Superman*. The pilot was directed by George Blair and written by Vernon Clark and Whitney Ellsworth. A solid and entertaining pilot, it was never picked up nor screened for the public. This was unfortunate as it had a lot going for it, including a solid cast and the participation of a number of people involved with the previous Superman series, including Blair and Ellsworth. More details can be found in the Superman chapter, starting on page 24.

Batgirl - 1967

With the popularity of *Batman*, producer William Dozier decided to try bringing another of the Bat-family to TV. A short pilot/presentation film was done with Yvonne Craig in the lead role of Barbara Gordon/Batgirl, supported by *Batman* stars Adam West (Batman), Burt Ward (Robin) and Neil Hamilton (Barbara's Father, Commissioner Gordon). After introducing the audience to the character and her origins, the pilot included an action set piece to demonstrate Craig's abilities on film. While this short has never been aired for the public, and *Batgirl* was never developed as its own series, the character was successfully incorporated into the third and final season of *Batman*. See more in the *Batman* chapter, starting on page 42.

Wonder Woman - 1967

Also developed in 1967 by *Batman*'s William Dozier was this quick pilot/presentation film for *Wonder Woman*. This was the first time the character was ever seen on film, although in a very different form than that of her comic counterpart. Lasting about six minutes, the pilot focused on Diana Prince's suburban angst and her Mother's wishes for her to settle down with a man. Ellie Wood Walker starred as Diana Prince/Wonder Woman, while Linda Harrison appeared as the way Prince saw herself in the mirror. The pilot was not picked up and it has not been screened for the public. More information about this pilot can be found in the *Wonder Woman* chapter, starting on page 70.

The 1970s

The 1970s was simply *the* time to be a comic and television fan. More projects were brought to the small screen here than at any other time. Beginning with the first ever live-action TV appearance of *Wonder Woman* in March, 1974 and ending with *Captain America* in November, 1979, the vast number of comic adaptations in the 1970s is incredible. For whatever reasons, superheroes were on everyone's minds at this time, and fans got to enjoy the results.

Wonder Woman - 1974

Wonder Woman appeared as a telefilm on March 12, 1974 starring Cathy Lee Crosby in the title role. Many people associated with the original *Star Trek* series worked on this production, including writers John D.F. Black and Margaret Armen as well as director Vincent McEveety. Although this version of *Wonder Woman* did not continue, another attempt at bringing the character to life was completed late in the following year. This pilot is shown on television once in a while, but it has not been made available on home video. Please see the *Wonder Woman* chapter, starting on page 70 for more details on this original telefilm.

The Electric Company - 1974

The first Marvel character to appear in a live-action series was Spider-Man in a series of short presentations on the PBS production, *The Electric Company*. Dancer/performer Danny Seagren portrayed the wall-crawler, even though he never spoke. Spider-Man's lines were presented as on-screen dialogue, in order to help children with reading comprehension. The Spider-Man segments appeared on *The Electric Company* from mid-1974 through 1977 when the program ended. Approximately 30 segments were produced. A handful of the Spider-Man skits have been released on *Electric Company* compilation DVD sets. For more information on this version of Spider-Man, see the hero's full chapter, starting on page 88.

Spider-Man (Danny Seagren) snags Luis Avalos, and scores of kids, on The Electric Company.

Shazam! - 1975

For Saturday morning viewers, *Shazam!* was created in 1975 and it ran for two seasons with years of reruns. It, along with Isis, an original character created for television, was the only live-action superhero program done outside of primetime in the decade. Only the pilot episode has been released on DVD as part of Warner Bros. 50th Anniversary celebration. It was made available as an on-pack promotion in 2005 for purchasing the third season of *Wonder Woman*. Page 60 provides more background on the *Shazam!* production.

Jackson Bostwick leaps into action as Captain Marvel!

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It's a Bird, It's a Plane, It's Superman! - 1975

Adapted from the mid-sixties light-hearted Broadway stage musical, this version for ABC premiered on February 1, 1975. It starred David Wilson in one of his first television roles, along with actress/singer Lesley Ann Warren as Lois Lane. Rounding out the cast was a selection of popular comedians of the time such as Al Molinaro, Loretta Swit and Kenneth Mars. Malachi Throne, who played False Face in the *Batman* series was also on-hand as one of the main bad guys. *It's a Bird, It's a Plane, It's Superman!* featured songs and music by TV theme song writer Charles Strouse, with a script co-written by David Newman—who would go on to create the scripts the first three *Superman* features and the *Sheena* feature, and Robert Benton, who would also co-write the first *Superman* feature. The director of the musical special was Jack Regas, who would later go on to direct for Sid & Marty Krofft on such productions as *Dr. Shrinker* and *Electra Woman and Dyna Girl*. This special has not been made officially available on home video.

Wonder Woman (Lynda Carter) takes out the trash. THE NEW ORIGINAL WONDER WOMAN ©Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. and DC Comics. All Rights Reserved.

The New Original Wonder Woman - 1975

The next attempt at Wonder Woman starred Lynda Carter and Lyle Waggoner, and became the hit that most people are familiar with. Its first appearance with this new title came on November 7, 1975, returning again in late April 1976. The series was finally picked up in October of that year and it ran until 1979, ultimately on two different networks. The entire series of *Wonder Woman* has been released on DVD. *Wonder Woman* is more fully detailed in its own chapter, starting on page 70.

Spider-Man - 1977

The first of several Marvel Comics-based TV series to hit the small screen, *Spider-Man*'s pilot telefilm premiered on CBS on April 19, 1977. The show aired irregularly for the next two years through July 6, 1979. It starred Nicholas Hammond in the title role and his civilian guise, Peter Parker. Without a fixed airing schedule, *Spider-Man* was never given a fair chance to grow, improve or find an audience. The series has been offered on home video, and select episodes were released on LaserDisc. *Spider-Man*'s full chapter begins on page 88, please see it for much more information.

Live from New York (and on-location), Spider-Man (Nicholas Hammond) roams the streets of the Big Apple.

The Incredible Hulk - 1977

The initial television pilot film for *The Incredible Hulk* led directly into its series. The powerful two-hour drama starred Bill Bixby as Dr. David Banner, and Lou Ferrigno as his enraged alter ego, The Hulk. Written by Ken Johnson, the pilot aired on November 4, 1977. Ratings proved to be as incredible as the character and the series was picked up. It began airing on March 10, 1978 as a mid-season replacement. One of television's longest-running comic adaptations, The Hulk finally ended his weekly adventures in 1982. All of the *Hulk* television series is available on DVD. *The Hulk* has a more detailed history in its own chapter, starting on page 132.

David Banner (Bill Bixby) transforms into The Incredible Hulk (Lou Ferrigno).

Doctor Strange - 1978

Towards the end of the boom in comic adaptations came a somewhat strange one—*Dr. Strange* as a matter of fact. Philip DeGuere, a prolific TV writer and occasional director, took both roles on this TV movie production. Starring Peter Hooten as the gifted sorcerer, Stephen Strange, and Jessica Walters as his adversary, Morgan LeFay, *Dr. Strange* aired on NBC on September 6, 1978. The *Dr. Strange* telefilm was made available on VHS. For more information about *Dr. Strange,* please see page 118.

Peter Hooten stars as the phenomenal Doctor Strange.

Legends of the Superheroes - 1979

Two hour-long parody specials aired on NBC in the beginning of 1979, which were reportedly the first of a planned series of similar programs. The first, entitled "The Challenge" aired on January 18, 1979, while the second, called "The Roast" aired a week later on January 25. The series never got beyond the second episode. Reprising their roles from a decade earlier were Adam West as Batman, Burt Ward as Robin and Frank Gorshin as The Riddler. A host of comedians including Jeff Altman, Howard Morris and Charley Callas were also on-hand to represent enemies. A number of DC characters made their first-ever live-action appearances within these specials. *Legends of the Superheroes* was written by the team of Peter Gallay and Mike Marmer, who were both frequent sitcom writers before and after these specials. Bill Carruthers and Chris Daley shared directing duties on the specials. Both gentlemen were better known for their work directing game shows like *Press Your Luck* (Carruthers) and *Scrabble* (Daley). Additional information about the *Legends of the Superheroes* series can be found in its own chapter, beginning on page 106.

Most of the cast of the Legends of the Superheroes *specials headed up by* Batman *TV series veterans Frank Gorshin, Adam West and Burt Ward.*

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Captain America - 1979

Reb Brown starred as the title hero in this pair of TV films. The first was aired on January 19, 1979 and had strong enough reaction and ratings to get the go-ahead for a follow-up. That second and final *Captain America* production aired on November 23, 1979. The films were pilots for a planned weekly series that was never developed. Both of the *Captain America* telefilms have been released on home video. Video versions of the second *Captain America* film were issued under the title, "Captain America II—Death Too Soon." Captain America has his own chapter discussing the two telefilms, starting on page 112.

Captain America (Reb Brown) fights for our rights in his second special.

The 1980s

The weekly saga of *The Incredible Hulk* ended, to return later in the decade with the first of three telefilms. The '80s also began some independent pilots and a new Superboy series. Plastic Man (as portrayed by Taylor Marks) even saw live-action in wrapraound segments for the syndicated version of his '70s cartoon series.

Sable - 1987

Published by the independent company, First Comics, the character of Jon Sable first appeared in 1983. As created by Mike Grell, Sable was a freelance mercenary who traveled the world for his jobs while maintaining a secret identity as a children's book writer. For the TV series, longtime character actor Lewis Van Bergen was chosen to play Sable, in one of his first lead roles. Co-starring were Rene Russo as Eden Kendell, in one of her first roles following a successful modeling career, as well as Ken Page as Sable's sidekick, Joe "Cheesecake" Tyson (who would later become famous as the voice of Oogie Boogie in Tim Burton's *The Nightmare Before Christmas*). The hour-long series premiered on ABC on November 7, 1987 and remained on the network's schedule through early January 2, 1988. A total of seven episodes were aired, not including an initial stab at a pilot starring rock group KISS co-founder Gene Simmons in the lead role. *Sable* has not been released commercially on home video.

Lewis Van Bergen as Sable.

The cast of Sable *included future leading lady Rene Russo (center) in her acting debut.*

Spirit (Sam Jones) and the captivating Ellen Dolan.

The Spirit - 1987

Will Eisner's famous crimefighter was adapted as a pilot for a potential *Spirit* TV series. Starring Sam J. Jones (from the *Flash Gordon* feature) and Nana Visitor (who would soon be in *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*), the two-hour telefilm was well-received, but was not picked up in the end. It was written by Steven E. De Souza, who had a long history of action television with credits on *The Six Million Dollar Man*, *The Bionic Woman* and *V*. It was directed by Michael Schultz, who had directed hundreds of hours of television, with *The Spirit* being his only foray into live-action superhero programming. *The Spirit* has not been made commercially available on home video.

Sam Jones as the jaw-cracking Spirit.

Hal Holbrook in Superman's 50th Anniversary Special.

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Superman 50th Anniversary - 1988

The *Superman 50th Anniversary* special was aired in 1988 as a partially comedic documentary look at the hero's life. It featured authentic interviews with creators of the character and stars of *Adventures of Superman*, mixed with tongue-in-cheek interviews with comedians appearing as fake heroes and villains, making for an odd show that never really gave the character the respect he was due. It remains one of the strangest entries into Superman lore. It was released as a special feature as part of the *Superman II* DVD release in 2006.

The Incredible Hulk Returns - 1988

Nearly six years after the demise of the television series, star Bill Bixby remained so enamored of the character that he brought The Hulk back, along with friend and co-star Lou Ferrigno, for a series of two-hour telefilms. Bixby acted as producer on this film, which was written and directed by Nicholas Corea, writer of a number of *Hulk* weekly series episodes. This first film aired on May 22, 1988. *The Incredible Hulk Returns* has been released on DVD.

Back in action, The Hulk (Lou Ferrigno) and David Banner (Bill Bixby) are joined by Thor (Eric Kramer).

Superboy / Adventures of Superboy - 1988

Superboy was an early first-run evening syndication success. It was produced by Alexander and Ilya Salkind, who created the first three *Superman* features. The series ran for four full seasons, at which time Warner Bros. decided to move ahead with another new Superman-based series. John Haymes Newton starred as Clark Kent/Superboy for the first season, while Gerard Christopher played the role for the final three seasons. Actress Stacy Haiduk played Lana Lang throughout the full series run. *Superboy*'s first season was released on DVD on June 20, 2006. More information about this series can be found on page 150.

Trial of the Incredible Hulk - 1989

The second Hulk telefilm guest-starred additional Marvel universe characters, The Daredevil and his arch-enemy, The Kingpin. The film was intended as the pilot for a weekly Daredevil series that was never developed. Gerald Di Pego wrote this feature and Bixby directed. *The Trial of the Incredible Hulk* aired almost a year after *The Incredible Hulk Returns*, on May 7, 1989 and it has been released on DVD.

The Kingpin, played by enigmatic actor John Rhys Davies.

The 1990s

The lack of comic-based programming in the '80s was more than made up for in the '90s. With the success of *Superboy* in syndication and more comic heroes appearing in feature films, television programmers were willing to take chances on developing more characters for home audiences. While the decade saw the last of The Hulk on TV, it also saw the beginning of a second major Superman series and a number of pilot projects that showed up on network and cable channels.

The Death of the Incredible Hulk - 1990

The third and final installment of Bill Bixby's Hulk TV movie trilogy finally wrapped up the saga begun more than a decade earlier. Again written by Gerald Di Pego and directed by Bill Bixby, it aired on February 18, 1990 as the final Hulk production to feature Bixby and Ferrigno. *The Death of the Incredible Hulk* was released on DVD.

Swamp Thing - 1990

After two popular feature films, DC's *Swamp Thing* was brought to television. It premiered on the USA network on July 27, 1991 and lasted for a total of three full seasons. Stuntman/actor Dick Durock, who portrayed the character in the features, returned to the role for the small screen. Actor Mark Lindsay Chapman, who later appeared in episodes of the comic-based series *Night Man* and *Lois & Clark*, starred in *Swamp Thing* as Dr. Arcane. The first season of *Swamp Thing* was released as a DVD box set on January 22, 2008. For more details, see *Swamp Thing*'s own expanded chapter, starting on page 144.

Big and small screen's Swamp Thing (Dick Durock) in his natural mossy habitat.

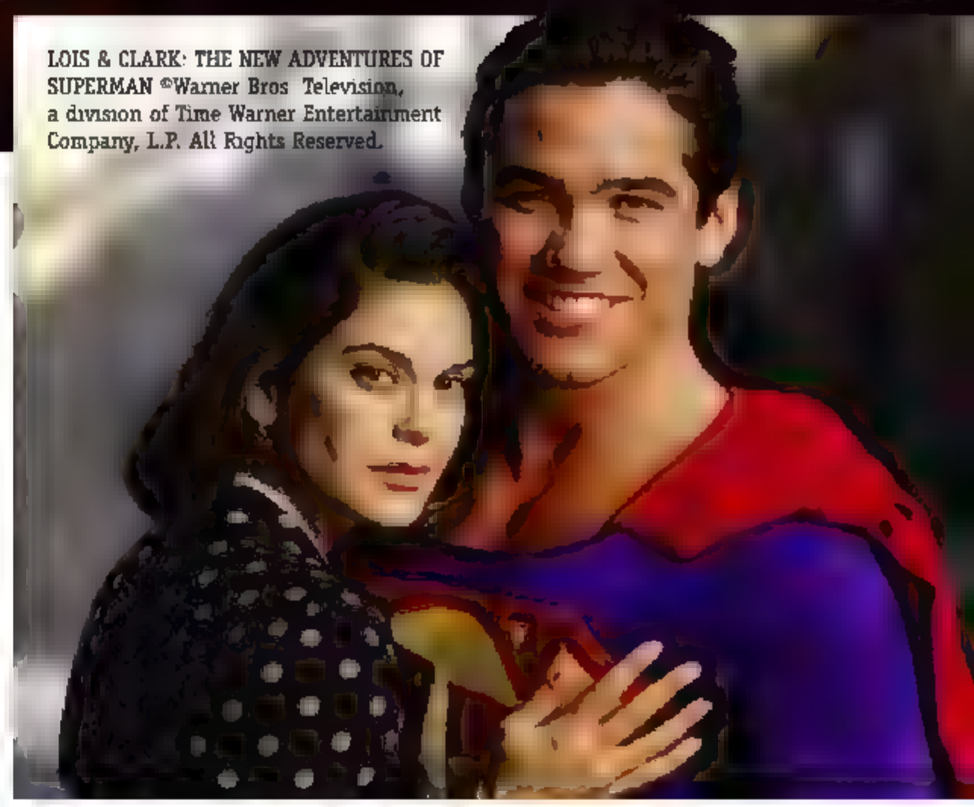
The Flash - 1990

For the second appearance of The Flash on live-action television (the first being part of NBC's *Legends of the Superheroes* specials in 1979), a much more serious attempt was made to present the character. Actor John Wesley Shipp was cast in the lead role, along with Amanda Pays as a researcher who assisted him with his newfound powers. This version of The Flash was helmed by comic writers Danny Bilson and Paul De Meo, and was heavily influenced by the look and tone of the previous year's *Batman* feature film. It premiered on CBS on September 20, 1990 and lasted a single season. *The Flash* was released as a complete series DVD set on January 10, 2006. *The Flash* has more information in his own chapter, beginning on page 172.

John Wesley Shipp speeds past screens as The Flash!

Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman - 1993

Successor to the syndicated *Superboy* series, *Lois & Clark* premiered on ABC on September 12, 1993. Proving to be just as popular as the earlier series, *Lois & Clark* also lasted a total of four full seasons. It starred Teri Hatcher as Lois Lane, along with Dean Cain as Clark Kent/Superman. Deborah Joy LeVine created the series and also created the most scripts of any other series writer. All four seasons of *Lois & Clark* have been released as DVD box sets. More details about *Lois & Clark* can be found in the *Superman* chapter, starting on page 38.


LOIS & CLARK: THE NEW ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN ©Warner Bros Television, a division of Time Warner Entertainment Company, L.P. All Rights Reserved.

The perfect couple, Lois Lane (Teri Hatcher) and Superman (Dean Cain).

Generation X - 1996

Based on the Marvel comic series, *Generation X* was aired as a two-hour telefilm on the FOX network on February 20, 1996. Character actress and soap opera staple Finola Hughes starred as the evil Emma Frost, the first time the character had been brought to life. Popular characters Banshee (Jeremy Retchford) and Jubilee (Heather McComb) were also seen in live-action for the first time. The film co-starred Matt Frewer (of *Max Headroom* fame). *Generation X* was written by Eric Blakeney and directed by Jack Sholder. It has not been made available on home video.

The young, hip cast of Marvel's Generation X *television movie.*

Vixen Talisa Soto as the sultry Vampirella!

Vampirella - 1996

The sexy vampire was introduced to readers by Warren Publications in September, 1969. Co-created by Sci-Fi mainstay Forrest Ackerman and Archie Goodwin, she starred in her own comic series for nearly fifteen years. The film was produced as part of the Showtime cable channel's "Roger Corman Presents" series and first aired on September 15, 1996. It starred Talisa Soto as Vampirella and rock star/actor Roger Daltrey as her nemesis, Vlad. For more information, see the expanded entry on Page 183. *Vampirella* has been released on home video and DVD in a slightly longer cut.

Night Man - 1997

The *Night Man* series was based upon the character created by Steve Englehart and published by independent producer, Malibu Comics. The main character was a musician who became a superhero after he was accidentally struck by lightning. *Night Man* premiered on September 15, 1997 and lasted two full seasons. *Night Man* has not been made commercially available on home video.

Nick Fury: Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. - 1998

For the first time ever, popular comic character Nick Fury was brought to life for a TV movie for the FOX network on May 26, 1998. Although likely intended as a pilot, the feature did not make much impact and the franchise has not been returned to. Fury was played by David Hasselhoff, best known for *Knight Rider* and *Baywatch*. The production had some major talent behind it, including writer David Goyer, who had a long history with fantasy and comic adaptation productions, with the most notable being the *Blade* features and series. *Nick Fury* was directed by Rod Hardy, a veteran of TV and film, but this marked his only dip, to date, into the pool of comic-based properties. The feature has been in semi-regular rotation on cable channels, and it was released on DVD on September 30, 2008.

PILOTS

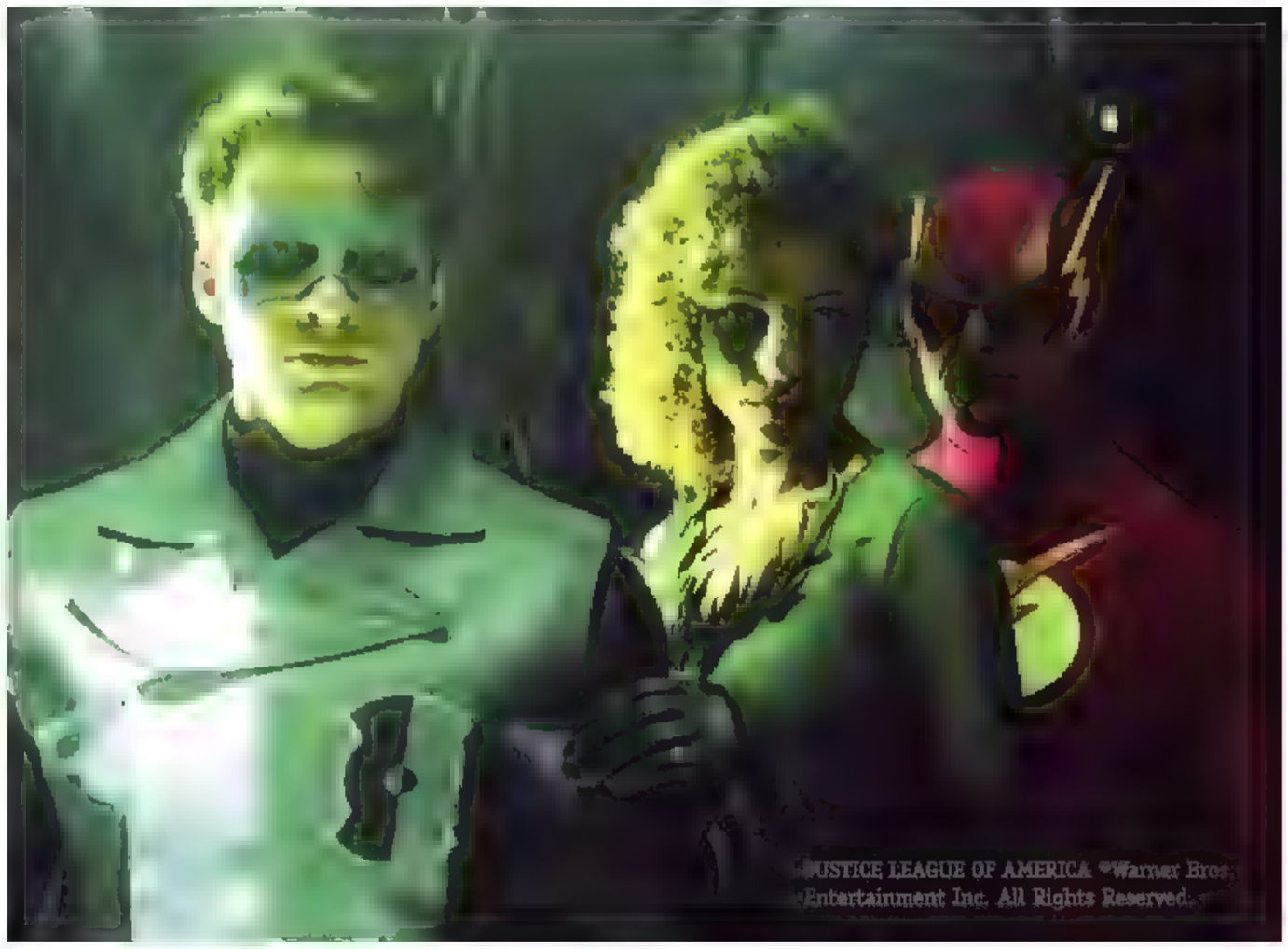
Power Pack - 1991

Based on the Marvel comic of the same name, *Power Pack* featured a group of six youngsters with super powers. The pilot was well produced and appealing for its target age group, but it was not picked up for series production. The half-hour pilot has been screened on television although it has not been made officially available on home video.

A menacing David Hasslehoff is more Nick Fury than you can handle!

Justice League of America - 1997

The comedic *JLA* telefilm produced for CBS was written by Lorne Cameron and David Hoselton. It was directed by Félix Enríquez Alcalá, who had earlier directed an episode of *Lois & Clark* in 1994, and went on to direct episodes of *Blade: The Series* in 2006. The pilot featured the first-ever live-action appearances of DC characters Fire (Michelle Hurd), Ice (Kimberly Oja), The Atom (John Kassir) and Martian Manhunter (David Ogden Stiers). The other members of the JLA were The Green Lantern (Matthew Settle), who had previously appeared in live-action in the *Legends of the Superheroes* specials, and The Flash (Kenny Johnston), who had also appeared in the *Legends of the Superheroes* and his own weekly series on CBS. The main enemy, The Weatherman, was played by Miguel Ferrer. The feature has not been aired on television in North America, nor has it been released commercially on home video.



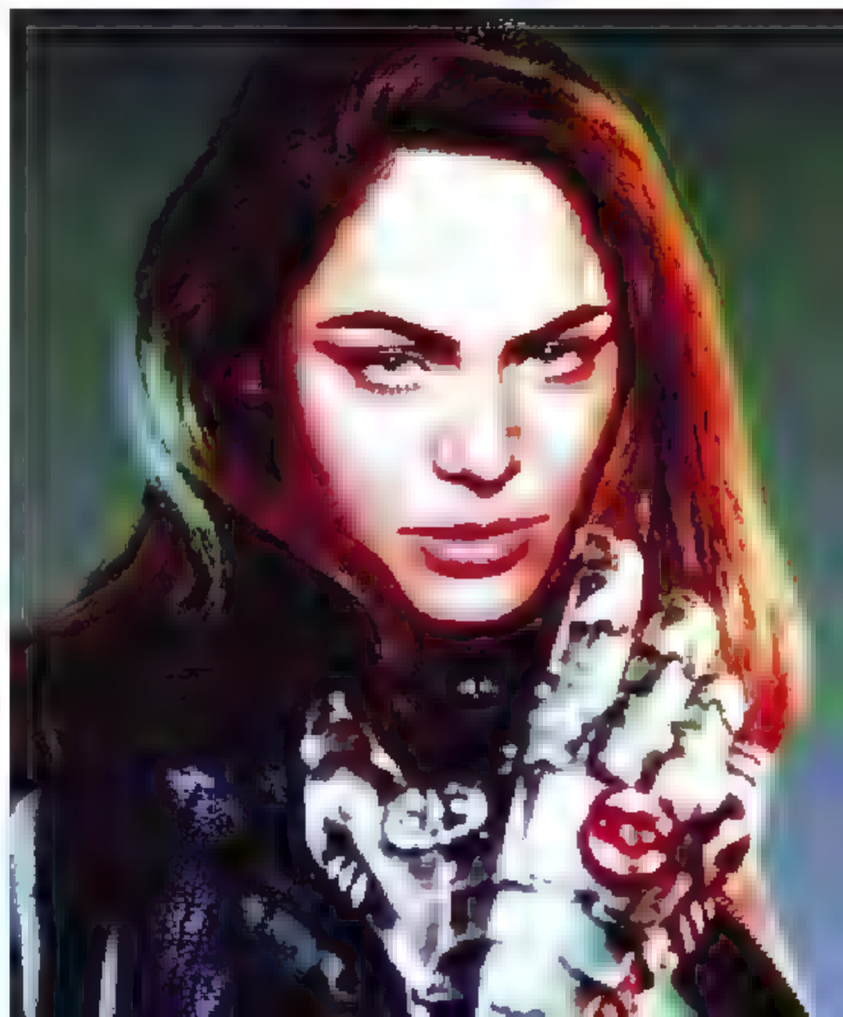
Green Lantern (Matthew Settle), Fire (Michelle Hurd) and The Flash (Kenny Johnston) as members of The Justice League.

The 2000s

This was another very active decade, mainly due again to the success of several major feature films to spotlight comic characters. The Superman franchise got its fourth major series on a brand-new network, while independent characters like Witchblade found a home on cable. As time goes on, more and more comic adaptations are sure to follow, hopefully appealing to comic and television fans alike.

Witchblade - 2000

Cable network TNT took a chance on backing a telefilm for *Witchblade*, a series created by writer Marc Silvestri and published by Top Cow Productions. The pilot film starred actress Yancy Butler as police detective Sara Pezzini, who would fight crime as Witchblade. When its August, 2000 debut proved successful, a series began airing the following year in June, 2001. Unfortunately, behind-the-scenes complications led to the downfall and ultimate cancellation of *Witchblade*, which had the potential of many seasons ahead of it. When its finale aired in August 2002, a total of twenty-three episodes had been produced. The complete *Witchblade* series, including the initial pilot telefilm, was released as a DVD box set on July 29, 2008.



Actress Yancy Butler as Image Comics' Witchblade.

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Sheena - 2000

Forty-four years after her initial appearance on television, Sheena was brought back for another round of adventures. This new version starred the beautiful former *Price is Right* game show model and *Baywatch* actress Gena Lee Nolin in the title role. It was developed by Douglas Schwartz, responsible for *Baywatch* and its spin-offs, and Steven L. Sears who was involved with bringing *Xena: Warrior Princess* and the adaptation of the *Swamp Thing* comic to television. Providing another tie to live-action comic television, Sears had written an episode of the Alexander Salkind-produced *Superboy* series earlier in his career. Sheena, which was produced for syndication began on October 7, 2000 and ran for a total of two full seasons. The series has not been commercially released on home video.

Baywatch *veteran Gena Lee Nolin as a Sheena for the next century.*

Smallville - 2001

Smallville is the longest continuously running program based on comic characters. The whole idea behind the series was to focus on Clark Kent's early upbringing from the end of High School through the time he transitioned into his life in Metropolis. The series premiered on the WB network on October 16, 2001 and has continued on for nine seasons as of the writing of this book. *Smallville*'s first eight seasons have been released on DVD, with seasons six through eight also seeing release on Blu-ray. Please see the expanded entry for *Smallville*, beginning on page 157.

Lex Luthor (Michael Rosenbaum), Clark Kent (Tom Welling) and Lana Lang (Kristen Kreuk) in the long-running Smallville.

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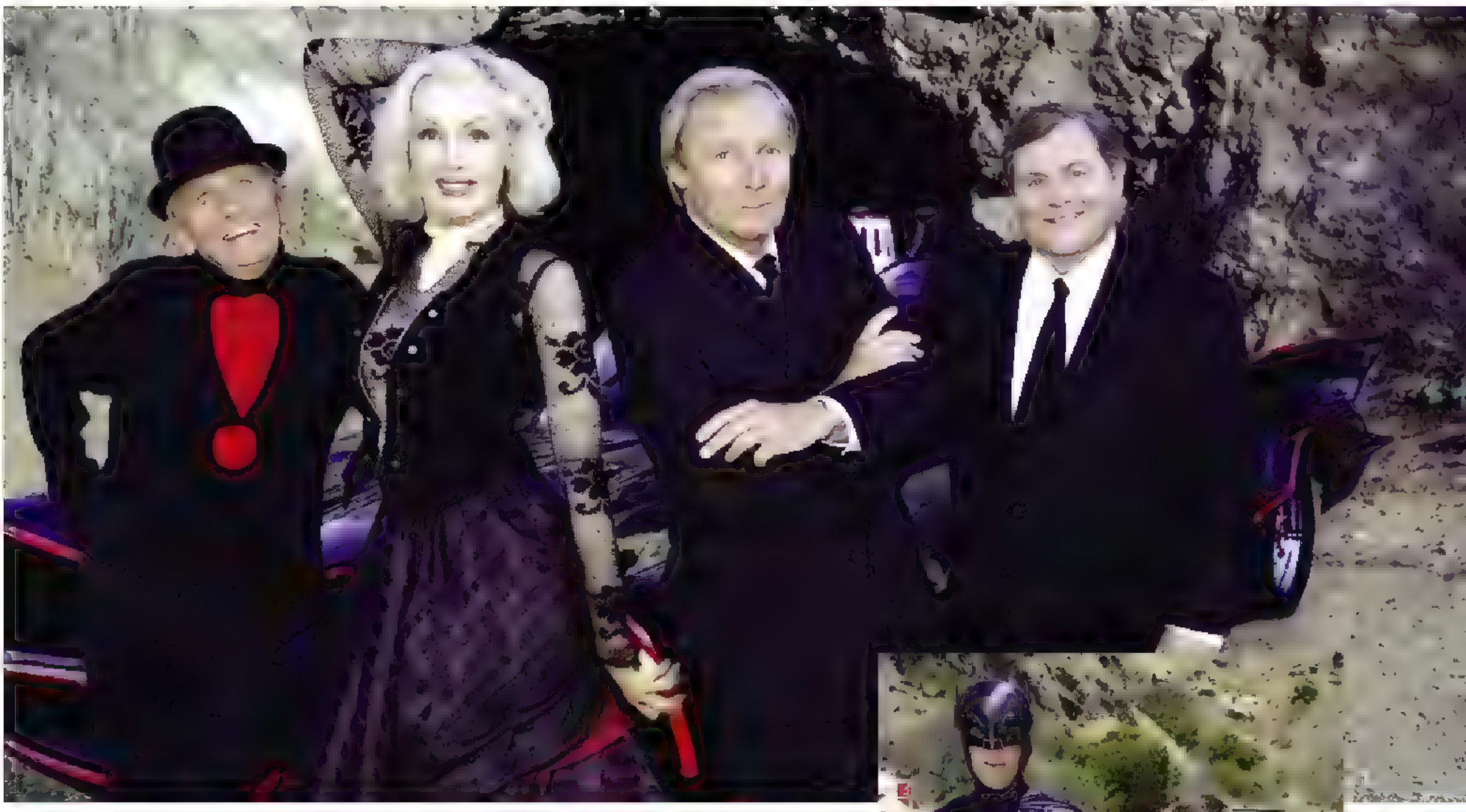
The Tick - 2001

Many years after The Tick's popular animated series on FOX, that same network gave the go-ahead for an ambitious live-action version. Starring Patrick Warburton as the title character and David Burke as his crimefighting partner, Arthur, the series kicked off on November 1, 2001. The characters Batmanuel (Nestor Carbonell) and Captain Liberty (Liz Vassey) were on-hand to round out The Tick's circle of close friends and associates. A fantastic production, *The Tick* produced nine episodes, only eight of which were broadcast. The entire *Tick* series has been released on DVD. Please see *The Tick*'s own chapter, starting on page 184, for more details about the production.

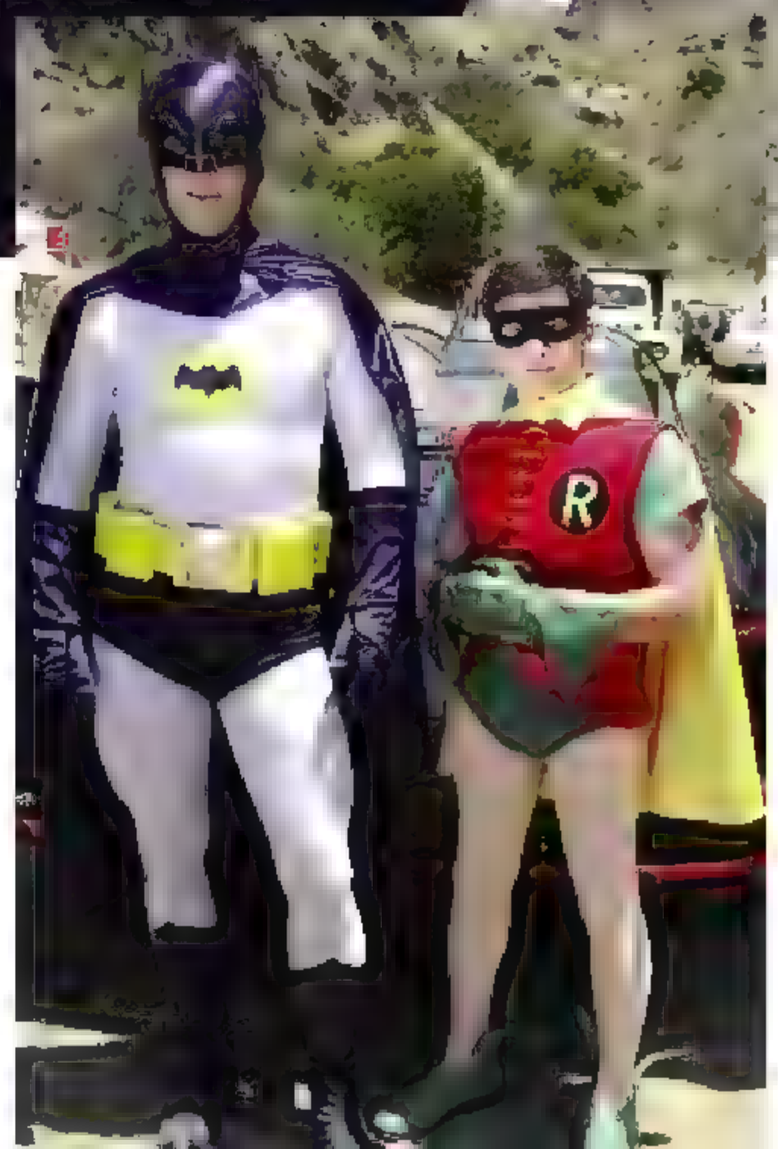
The unstoppable cast of The Tick!

Return to the Batcave - The MisAdventures of Adam and Burt - 2002



Returning favorites from the Batman *TV series, Frank Gorshin, Julie Newmar, Adam West and Burt Ward.*

A comedic one-shot, *Return to the Batcave* was completed nearly a year before it aired on CBS on March 9, 2003. The two-hour special featured Adam West and Burt Ward back together for their first new adventure since the *Legends of the Superheroes* specials in early 1979. Co-starring were Julie Newmar and Frank Gorshin from the original *Batman* series. Actors Jack Brewer and Jason Marsden portrayed Adam West and Burt Ward respectively, in reenactments/recreations of stories from the original show's production. Lyle Waggoner also appeared, to play off the fact that he nearly got the role of Bruce Wayne/Batman in the 1960s. *Return to the Batcave* was written by Duane Poole, who had previously done the scripts for *Electra Woman and Dyna Girl*. The special was directed by Paul Kaufman. It was released on DVD on May 17, 2005.



Jack Brewer and Jason Marsden as Adam West and Burt Ward.

The gorgeous trio of Birds of Prey, *Dinah (Rachel Skarsten), Oracle (Dina Meyer) and The Huntress (Ashley Scott).*

Oracle/Batgirl (Dina Meyer).

The Huntress (Ashley Scott).

Birds of Prey - 2002

With the popularity of the first season of *Smallville*, the WB Network decided to bring another current DC series to life, this time with the *Birds of Prey* characters that first appeared in comics in 1996. The series' first episode aired on October 9, 2002. While many of the changes made for *Smallville* were intriguing and worked well, fans did not receive the alterations in *Birds of Prey* as warmly. Somewhat adapted from the DC comic, featuring Dina Meyer as Oracle (with a brief appearance as Batgirl in the pilot episode), Ashley Scott as The Huntress and Rachel Skarsten as Dinah, the daughter of Black Canary, *Birds of Prey* seemed to be a little too extreme in changing the backstories of the characters from the comics, as well as giving nearly every person "metahuman" powers. Despite references to many (and even appearances of some) DC characters like The Joker, Batman and Harley Quinn and the three attractive leads, the series simply did not seem to gel and it was not popular enough with viewers to continue. In the end, *Birds of Prey* was cancelled after a half-season of thirteen episodes. Producers were given ample warning of the series' pending demise, so they were able to create a suitable end for it rather than leave it hanging. The complete series of *Birds of Prey* was released on DVD in North America on July 15, 2008.

Blade: The Series - 2006

Blade began his comic adventures in the early seventies, appearing in a host of Marvel's horror/vampire comics. In the mid-nineties the half-human, half vampire character was featured in a standalone miniseries and began to grow in popularity. Blade was adapted to the big screen where actor Wesley Snipes played the role in a trilogy of films from 1998 to 2004. For the television adaptation two years later, Blade was played by actor/rapper, Sticky Fingaz. The *Blade* television series premiered on the Spike cable channel on June 28, 2006, where it ran for a total of twelve episodes. The complete series was released on home video on February 12, 2008.

Sticky Fingaz as Blade, from Spike's television series.

Matt Keeslar and Natalie Morales inhabit the bizarre world of The Middleman.

The Middleman - 2008

Originally conceived as a television project by writer Javier Grillo-Marxuach and illustrator Les McClaine, *The Middleman* was first introduced in 2005 in his own book published by Viper Comics. When that proved successful, ABC Family took up the reins and launched a TV series that premiered on June 16, during the 2008 Summer season. The comedic, pop culture-savvy series centered on the escapades of The Middleman, a mysterious, straight arrow enemy of evil and his new recruit, Wendy Watson, an art student with no previous crimefighting experience. The series starred Matt Keeslar in the title role, with relative newcomer, Natalie Morales as Wendy. *The Middleman* lasted one season on ABC Family and its entire run was released on DVD on July 28, 2009.

The Middleman (Matt Keeslar) with Wendy Watson (Natalie Morales).

PILOTS

Knights of Justice - 2000

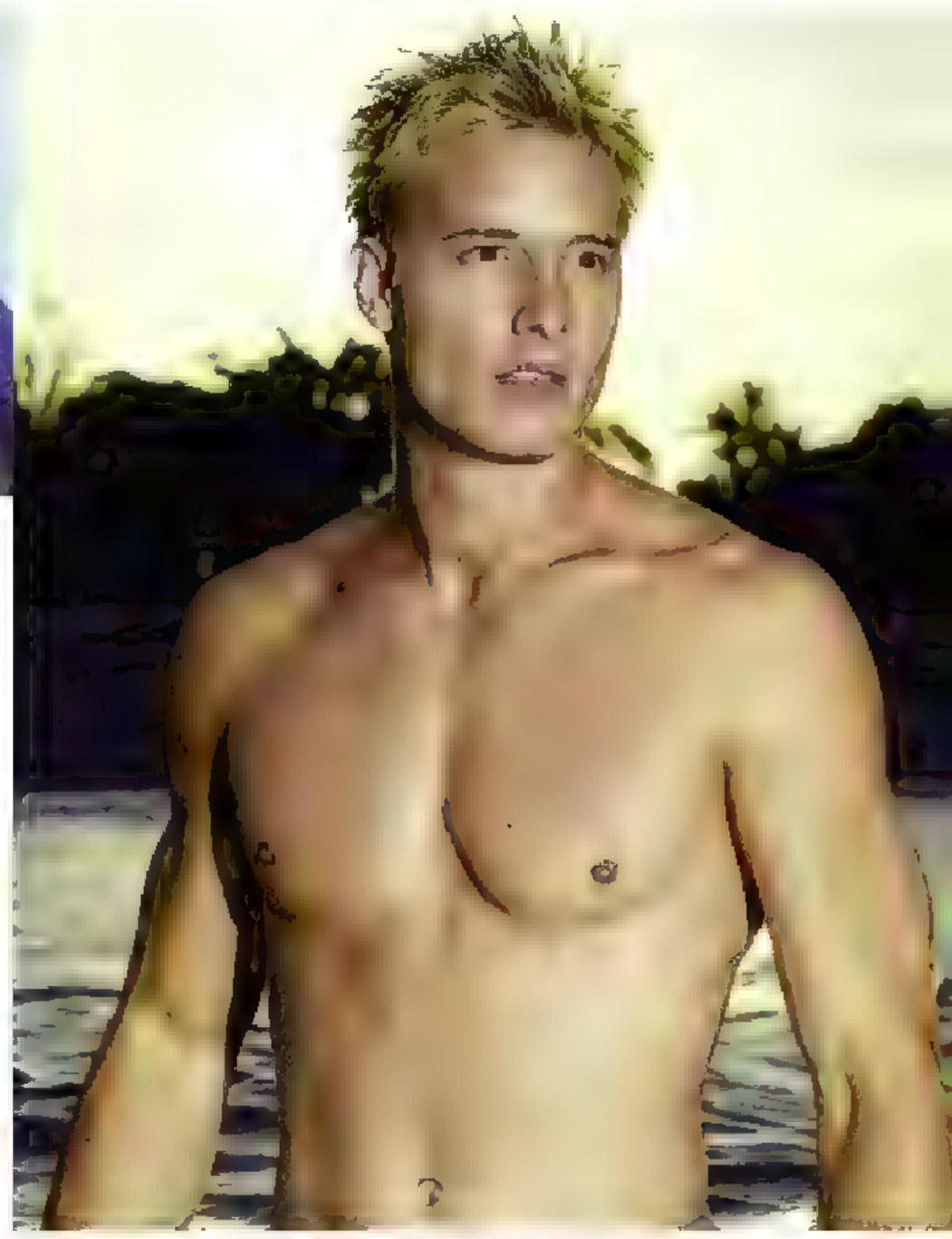
Independent comic publishers Big Bang Comics put together a live-action pilot featuring many of their hero characters. It featured actress Lorin Taylor as Masker, Allen Woodman as the Knight Watchman and Sandra Kuhn as Thundergirl. *Knights of Justice* was directed by Philip Cable. The pilot has not been aired on television, but has been made available for direct purchase through Big Bang Comics' website, and directly at their various convention appearances.

The independently produced Knights of Justice Pilot starred Thundergirl (Sandra Kuhn), Knight Watchman (Allen Woodman), Masker (Lorin Taylor) and Ultiman (Dan Layne).

Aquaman - 2006

The phenomenal success of *Smallville*, allowed series creators Alfred Gough and Miles Millar to develop a pilot for *Aquaman* in 2006. While the character had appeared in two previous episodes of *Smallville* played by Alan Ritchson, new actor Justin Hartley was chosen to play Aquaman/Arthur Curry for the potential series. The one-hour *Aquaman* pilot guest-starred Lou Diamond Phillips and Ving Rhames, but even with this star power it ultimately went unsold. Unlike most unsold pilots, the public was given a couple of chances to view this production—first as an exclusive iTunes download, then later on DVD in 2007 as an on-pack buying incentive for purchasing a season of *Smallville*. It has not been screened on television in North America.

Justin Hartley makes a splash as Aquaman in the series' pilot.



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THE ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN
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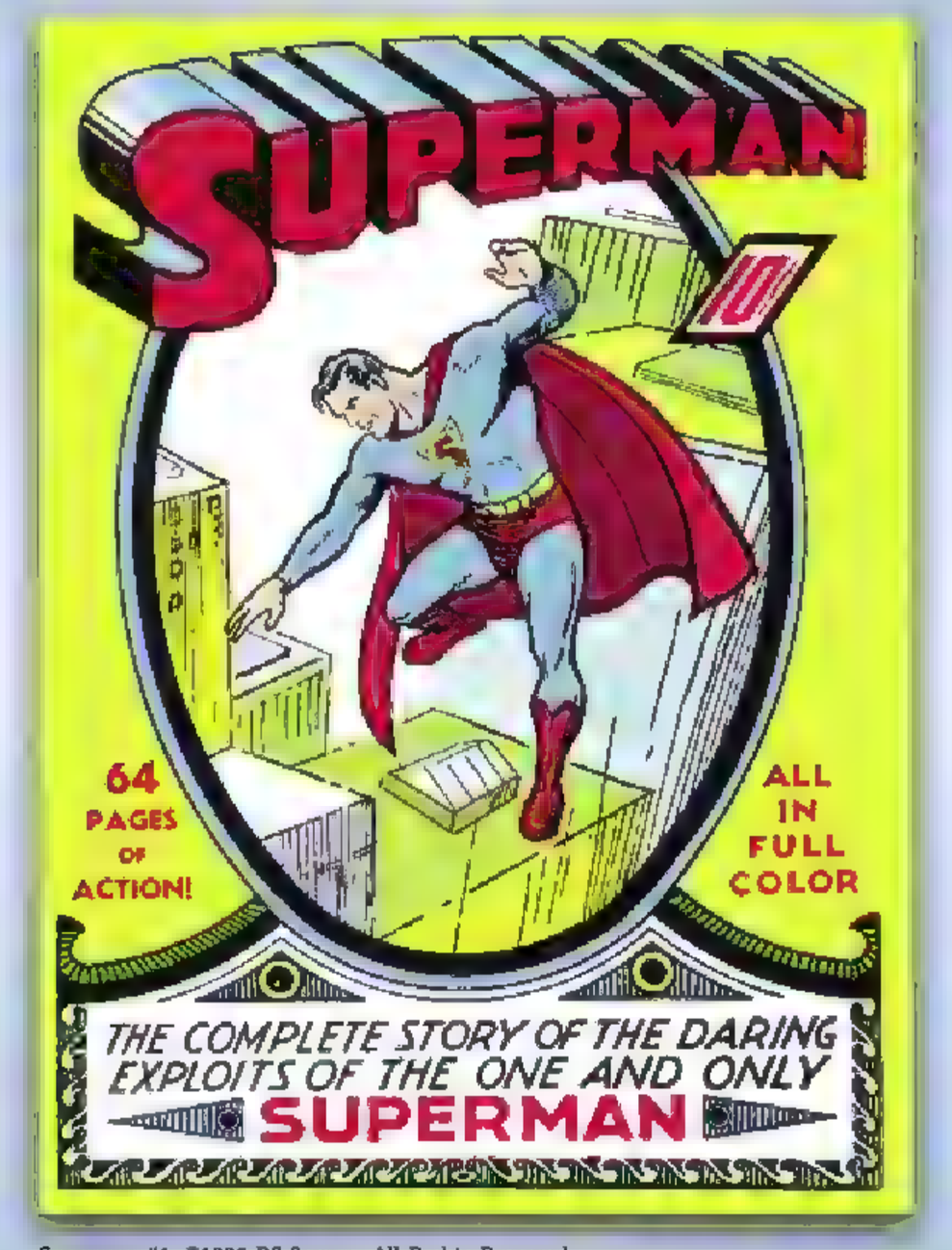
chapter 2

THE ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN

Superman was originally conceived in the summer of 1933 by writer Jerome Siegel and artist Joseph Shuster, two lifelong friends from Cleveland, Ohio. After years of fine tuning and pitches to various other publishers, the pair finally sold their hero to Detective Comics Inc. (DC Comics) in 1938. Once the character made his debut in *Action Comics* #1, the pop culture world would never forget the word "superhero"—a genre basically named after him. The Man of Steel's success came immediately and millions of his comics have since been sold. He's one of the great merchandising properties of the twentieth century, becoming the first comic book character to successfully cross into every major medium: newspapers, television, radio, cartoons, motion pictures and beyond. Although the character has slightly evolved over his seventy years of existence in the public consciousness, Superman remains not only one of the most identifiable characters throughout the world, but one of the most beloved and endearing icons in all fiction.



Superman #1. ©1939 DC Comics. All Rights Reserved.

Superman's story is undoubtedly one of the greatest contributions to modern day mythology from the world of comic books. At its finest, his is a tale full of responsibility, integrity, and wonderment—one that shows us that we all possess the inner strength to be true to ourselves and those around us. In *Superman* #1 (1939), Jerry Siegel defined the character as "Superman—Champion of the oppressed, the physical marvel who has sworn to devote his existence to helping those in need!"

Within the comics, Superman was born as Kal-El on the planet Krypton to his mother Lara and his scientist father Jor-El. Upon discovering the imminent destruction of their world, Jor-El places his only son into a small spacecraft that will take him to Earth, and thus give his infant a chance to live a full life. When the child lands, he is

A young reader engaged by *Superman* #19 (Nov./Dec. 1942).

found by Jonathan and Martha Kent, a childless couple that adopt the alien and raise him with their pure-hearted values on their farm. Naming him Clark Kent, the Kents not only dote on him with affection but instill virtue, wholesome goodness, and work ethic into the center of his being. As he grows into a young man, his superpowers also mature: dazzling strength and invulnerability, astonishing flight, amazing speed, uncanny x-ray vision and heat vision and more wondrous gifts come to him. It becomes evident to Clark that his gifts are a responsibility that he has to use for the betterment of mankind, wherever trouble might arise. With a red cape and blue costume that bears an "S" symbol on his barreled chest, he is reborn as a hero named Superman.

To serve the greatest good, Clark moves to the booming hustle of Metropolis, where he takes a job working at the *Daily Planet* newspaper as an unassuming reporter, a role that keeps Superman close to any ongoing wrongdoings or catastrophic events. In the newsroom, he discovers a second family in the guise of editor Perry White, cub reporter/photographer Jimmy Olsen and his senior colleague Lois Lane, the object of his affection. Along with a faster paced life style in the big city, Superman encounters new terrors and constant despair caused by an array of villains, including his worst nemesis, Lex Luthor, whose envy for Superman consumes his genius. No matter how impossible the odds, Superman fights the good fight for all of us—he'll forever stand for "Truth, Justice and the American Way."

By 1940, a long lasting *Adventures of Superman* radio show—featuring Bud Collyer in the titular role, with Joan Alexander as Lois Lane—took listeners by storm as the Man of Tomorrow crossed into the medium. The very next year, Superman arrived to the big screen in the first of seventeen action-packed, big budgeted, animated Technicolor short films initiated by Max & Dave Fleischer (with Collyer and Alexander voicing their characters), which still remains one of the best cartoons to hit any screen format, even earning a 1942 Academy Award nomination. Finally, 1948 saw the first live-action interpretation of the Son of Krypton, played by the spirited Kirk Alyn [in a later serial series, he portrayed DC hero Blackhawk]; his Lois Lane was the lovely actress Noel Neill. Alyn appeared in two theatrical serial series, respectively titled, *Superman* and *Atom Man vs. Superman*.

With 1951's low-budgeted theatrical *Superman and the Mole Men*, actor George Reeves found himself in the role of a lifetime—one that would take him from a mere hardworking actor and turn him into an icon, one of the first true stars of the small screen. Apart from the debut of Reeves' mighty Superman and the elegant Phyllis Coates' straight-laced Lois Lane, the black-and-white production was your typical fifties B-movie sci-fi picture: an oil drill uncovers a race of mole men that innocently start paranoia in a small town. Under his screenwriting pseudonym of "Richard Fiedling," former Supes radio drama producer Robert Maxwell wrote the story, cast the two principals and co-produced the nearly hour-long feature at

Jack Larson remained a part of the Superman universe in 2006 with a cameo in *Superman Returns*.

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DAILY PLANET
SUPERMAN, WHO SAVED TRAIN, RESCUES MINERS
NEWS FLASHES
Suspension Faced in Oil Scandal
Mayor Describes New Building Program to House Civic Office

Clark Kent (Kirk Alyn) and Lois Lane (Noel Neill) in a still from the first Superman chapter play, 1948.

the behest of DC head and company co-founder Jack Liebowitz, as part of an initiative to bring Superman to the new medium of television. With the film's modest success, and Kellogg's Cereals as the show's sponsor, Superman was on his way to a TV series.

For the shiny new series, both George Reeves and Phyllis Coates returned to their roles. Remembering her first sight of the actor in full costume, the alluring Ms. Coates remembered, "I laughed. He was wonderful. He had a martini in his hand and he said 'Come into my dressing room and have a martini with me and let's talk about this thing.'"

She also mentioned, "George gave me equal billing. It was his idea, I hadn't really thought about billing at that time and that's the kind of guy he was. He was wonderful to work with. He was off-camera if you had to read lines, you know. He was there with his martini and his fedora for you. That's very important."

Jimmy Olsen, a character originally introduced in 1940 for the radio series (and subsequently in the comics) was brought to life on the television screen the by a young actor from Los Angeles named Jack Larson. Despite his boyish looks, he was already a seasoned performer who had been a contract player at Warner Brothers and an experienced artist in front of the bright lights of live theatre. Although he had initially seen the work as means to other career opportunities, the actor was a fan of the *Superman* comics growing up. "When I did them (the shows)," says Larson, "my dad was a truck driver of wholesale milk, and he said, 'They're not giving you anything; you're just giving back the dimes I gave you to buy the *Superman* comic book.' Because I was a big, initially, Superman fan as a kid, when the comic book came out."

Larson continued, "I didn't really want to do it, and then they said, well, at that time the casting man, who was a wonderful guy, and my agent said that, 'Look, this will never go on the air. No one will ever see it.' All these months' work and you'll make enough money to go to New York, which is where I wanted to go, and they said, 'Take the money and run.' So I did

Actor George Reeves befriends two young fans visiting the set of Superman.

the show and I was very, very happy to have done it, because it was a great learning process, and we worked with wonderful actors. Not only George Reeves. And of course there was Phyllis Coates—initially "Gypsy" Coates, who played Lois Lane, but John Hamilton and all the wonderful actors who came through the show, because it was a tough time in the movie industry. Studios had closed down, essentially, except for Fox and MGM. RKO went under, Warners had closed up, and there wasn't a lot of work, and very fine actors were happy to get the work doing villains or what have you on *Superman*. So I loved doing it with people like Sterling Holloway and later Elizabeth Patterson and, etc., etc., etc. I was very happy to have done it."

Although *Adventures of Superman* did air in some Midwest areas in September of 1952, it launched nationally on February 9, 1953, and television would never be the some again. With its premiere episode, "Superman on Earth," viewers were told the tale of Superman's origin and motivation in a highly engaging manner that hit all the right notes. The endurance and determination of the good-natured Reeves instantly gave credibility to The Man of Tomorrow. The high ratings that came to this one-camera show proved there was an audience that believed in Superman. The show also proved a success to its sponsors, Kellogg's, who filmed successful television spots starring George Reeves and Jack Larson in character. Ironically, the commercial spots paid better than each actor received per episode.

Recalling his first time sharing a moment with George Reeves, Larson remembered, "They had standing *Gone with the Wind* sets, but the background was mainly roads and things, but the street scene is what most studios, like Warner Brothers and MGM had major studios, New York sets, Western scenes. RKO-Pathe Studios did not have that, and so they went to a city scene that Hal Roach had in which Jimmy had been captured by villains and was being lured in a safe out of a high building, and the rope was going to break, and George Reeves as Clark Kent sees that, becomes Superman, and catches the safe and saves Jimmy's life and takes him out of the safe before it hits the ground. And so George and I were waiting to do this scene, and that was the first time we worked together. And we did indeed really meet and talked and we were sitting in these director's chairs, and he complimented me on my work in *Fighter Squadron*, and then I complimented him on his work in *So Proudly We Hail!*, which I had seen because my father's favorite actress was Claudette Colbert. I'd seen that film and remembered George, and he then said about that director, Mark Sandrich, 'If Mark Sandrich hadn't died while I was away in the Army, he would have continued to cast me.' He said, 'If he hadn't died, I wouldn't be sitting here today in this monkey suit.' That was the first exchange that we had like that, and he never ever complained again or indicated any dissatisfaction with being Superman and being in the suit. But that's what he said that first day we were together."

This show was creating all the rules when it came to making the audience believe that man could fly. To give

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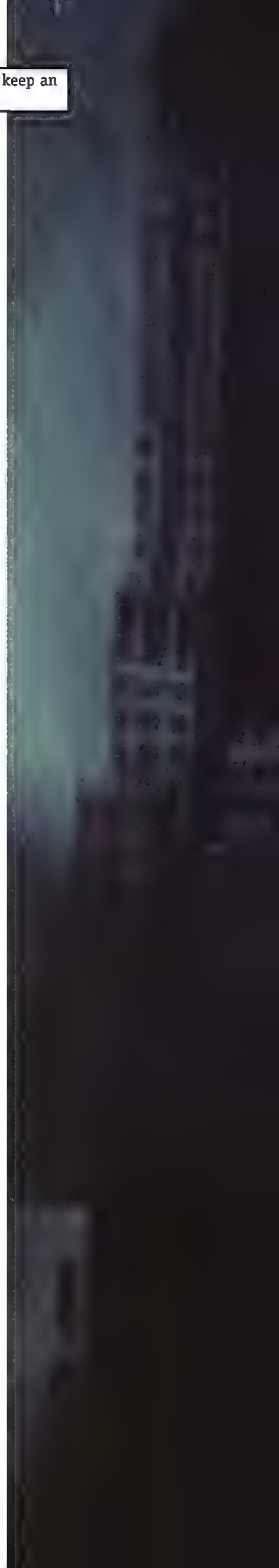
Superman his flying ability, Reeves and Thol "Si" Simonson, the show's special effects supervisor, settled on using a springboard that catapulted the actor for a slight jump that allowed for a more effective illusion of flight than previous experiments. An early flying technique consisted of "George flying on wires." Coates mentioned, "They had like a see-saw where he would come flying through a window. Somebody would do the board and he would fly, would fling forward and land on a mattress!"

Remembering the methods of Superman's flight, Jack Larson recalled, "It (the wire) broke while he was going to save Jimmy and Lois from a forest fire early on in the '51 season, and he wouldn't be on wires again. And so they had to discover a way that he could, instead of taking off on wires like Chris Reeve and Brandon Routh (did)—they put a diving board in the floor. And they put mattresses over the camera and bleachers, and George would run, hit the diving board, leap, and be able to leap and keep his feet out of camera as he leapt over camera and into the air. Those look like Superman did in the comic books. I mean, he's really taking off. And the landings were athletically the reverse. They would put a bar, a steel bar, over wherever he was doing it, he would jump from these bleachers over camera and grab the bar and propel himself into the set and land. They

Meanwhile, back at the *Daily Planet* are Jimmy Olsen (Jack Larson) and Lois Lane (Noel Neill).

The *Superman* cast (Reeves, Larson, Neill and John Hamilton) in an enjoyable candid shot between takes.



Despite the demanding filming schedule, George Reeves always did his best to keep an upbeat set. The Superman actor is pictured with his leading lady (Noel Neill).

looked like very good landings. In that way I think our show has always been superior to any of the takeoffs and landings in any of the subsequent work, which was all done with wires."

"The wires broke on George once," Coates elaborated. "I got a hysterical laughter and when he got up he said 'I'm going to kill you!' *[laughs]* The actress noted the stunt had knocked the wind out of the hardworking actor; it was enough of a scare that it caused the crew to rethink their approach. Reeves' seemingly simple takeoffs and landings gave viewers something that was more authentic and realistic than future incarnations and advanced wire techniques.

The first season was a thinly disguised hard crime show that featured much mayhem, murders and gunplay given its targeted family viewers. The twenty-six episodes of the first season delivered much of the flavor of the radio show and were filmed shortly after the feature at the end of 1951. Despite the series' entertaining results, producer Robert Maxwell exited the show supposedly due to budget concerns and the sponsor's need to lighten the overall tone. On DC's behalf (since they primarily financed the show), comics editor Whitney Ellsworth having advised on most DC-related film work, became the company's Hollywood liaison. He inherited Maxwell's duties and would speedily take the show into more family friendly territory for the rest of its on-air life. After the first season, no characters were ever murdered on-screen again as things were toned down completely. Criminals were portrayed more as comical buffoons than menacing men of despair and violence.

About the changes made to the show, Phyllis Coates commented, "Bob Maxwell produced a lot of the series, and Whitney Ellsworth came in and he was sort of Jell-O and turned it into some kind of sugary thing. And Jack Larson said, 'If Phyllis hadn't have left, I never would have been able to play comedy.' Well, I never knew *Superman* was a comedy... We didn't intend it as a comedy. It got a little 'sticky-icky' but that was Ellsworth too that let it get that far."

Never one to look back, Ms. Coates saw the change as a way to exit the production. She had done her share of *Superman*, and was ready to leave the safety nest of the series in favor of trying some different roles. Ms. Coates mentioned, "Bob Maxwell had moved over to produce *Lassie* and Whitney Ellsworth called and they wanted me to return and they offered me an enormous salary but I didn't want to go back. George (Reeves) called and they wanted me (back). They said, 'You're crazy,' 'You're a fool; residuals are going to kick in...' But something just told me 'no.'"

Having played Lois Lane only a few years before in the serials, red-haired actress Noel Neill returned to play the character until the completion of the series. Arriving to the show and becoming Lois Lane again didn't faze her. Neill said, "No, I figured it was a logical thing. After all, I'd done Lois Lane originally and so it was very fine when Whitney Ellsworth called me and said, 'We know that you did the Lois with Kirk Alyn and you were Lois before, would you like to be her again?'—and I said fine. So it was that simple, I just went to work for them."

As fans have often pointed out, both actresses approached Lane very differently. While Coates's Lois was a bit more gritty and serious, Neill's portrayal was easy-going and less of the hardnosed reporter-type than her predecessor. Staying true to the changes in the show, Noel Neill portrayed her character according to the writers' tempo. Neill replied, "That was up until Kellogg's got involved in the show. They wanted to keep it 'nice;' they were for children. Because to them, selling cereal was the big thing, so they wanted to keep it sort of for the kids. So there should be no killing, no blood flowing, whatever. Which was fine, and they just did everything that way from then on."

Under its new direction, Superman revved up the science-fiction factor that excited kiddies and gave grownups something to chuckle about as they suspended their disbeliefs. The series, with its simple parables of good and evil, was never designed to realistically portray the real world. It wasn't a vehicle for modern expressionism, existentialism or any other false pretensions—it was a show simply asking young viewers to let their imaginations run wild and join in on an adventure with the coolest fantasy character of the twentieth century. Much of the Man of Steel's popularity is a testimony to the power and integrity of Superman's mass success on the tube. When you consider that television was at its infancy when this show aired, you start to understand the sense of wonder that delighted viewers in the 1950s not accustomed to seeing the fantastic in their living rooms. This is something we probably take for granted today.

"Yes, there was a change," Jack Larson said. "I don't know what the situation had been with Bob Maxwell. I liked him very much and I thought he was a very good producer. And as the fans have told me through the years, and you may feel that the '51 shows, which are very Film Noir, are the best shows of all the seasons. I don't really feel

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Superman (George Reeves) rushes in to save captives Lois Lane (Noel Neill) and Jimmy Olsen (Jack Larson) in the fourth season episode "The Jolly Roger".

that. They later became kind of overly comic and everything, which I enjoyed, but the villains became comic. That wasn't because of the change of producers, that was because there was a huge investigation, I mean, it was always going on—which I guess is now going on into electronic games which are bad for the young people, and there are Senate investigations and all of that, into that corruption. They started with the comic books and then in television, and the *Superman* show was considered too violent. 'The Evil Three' had very fine actors, Rhys Williams and Jonathan Hale, who were wonderful to work with. We go to this cabin and all, and they menace Perry White and Jimmy and pushed an old woman down the basement stairs, but they intend to kill Jimmy and Perry White. That was taken out of the package because it was considered too violent, and so they softened the shows. They were no longer Film Noir beginning in the '53 season. Whit Elsworth had been top executive editor of the comic books and knew all the top story men there, including Mort Weisinger."

When it came to filming these episodes, the actors weren't given any mandate. The scripts under Ellsworth's regime came across readily on the page. Neill expressed, "It kind of just depended on the scripts and we just knew that the heavies were not to be killed the hard way and just to be held in place, lock them up. So George would always just tie them up and that was that. You know, not kill them. Just lock them up and tie them up so he could rescue Jack and I."

"*Superman* was a horse of a different color," Jack Larson said. "When they shot the second season, they decided to save money by shooting all of the office scenes over a five-show—they scheduled five shows at the same time, and the expense, the time you spend in making a film, or the change of set-ups and lighting is what takes time, and so they started to do all of the close-ups and the *Daily Planet* shots for five shows, to do them in the same set-up. You'd go from one show to another to another and then back and then the close-ups, and it didn't work at all, and just, that was very confusing. It confused the directors, it confused... We all tried to do what we could, but I won't say it enhanced anybody's performance. That was a money-saving thing to save moves, lighting moves and camera moves, and it didn't work."

Ironically, Noel Neill's father was a respected journalist in his own right during the first half of the twentieth century. Despite this, the actress mentioned there were no parallels with her real life that she took into her role. Neill said, "Oh no, no. No, because it was so different, I mean this was the first newspaper without a lot of people running around and no one carried a pad and pencil. We just did it as fast as we were told and the scripts pretty well wrote themselves. They were always

From the feature *Superman and the Mole Men*, George Reeves and TV's season one Lois Lane, Phyllis Coates.

the same. George said that 'The heavies were always the same, they just had different names.' *[laugh]"*

Despite playing the most powerful person in the universe, the grueling film schedule, personal appearances and dealing with a celebrity that came with the nature of this role, George Reeves was hardly someone consumed by his fame. The outgoing performer was a good-natured man that was trusting and accessible to his fellow cast and crew. His co-star Noel Neill elaborated, "He was just such a nice person that you didn't think of him as anyone other than George Reeves. Of course, half the time he was Clark Kent too, and he did most of his flying stuff at the end of each show. In a private place without a lot of people watching him—which is what he wanted when he did all the flying sequences. So we didn't really see him in action in that way."

Chiming in on Reeves, Jack Larson said, "George was a noble character in life as well. He called himself 'Honest George, the People's Friend.' No, he carried it all off very handsomely. He didn't like being in the suit for a long time because it would cause his skin to break out, and it was not pleasant physically to be sitting there in the summer in this suit with foam rubber padding and things like that... I thought he carried it off very well. And he didn't like to be in the suit in front of regular people, 'civilians,' as we called them, on the set or whatever."

Besides Reeves' graceful portrayal of the Man of Steel, the casting of Jack Larson as Superman's pal Jimmy Olsen perfectly gave children someone they could relate with—a character that was as curious as they were. Larson's co-star and friend, Neill mentioned, "I remember him rehearsing a lot when we would do all the office stuff at the end of each twenty-sixth. We'd get rid of all our heavies during the first hours to save money for the company. Get rid of those, off-salary. Then we would do all of the office stuff for the twenty-six shows during the last two weeks. [Editor's note: Shooting of twenty-six episodes was the norm for a full television season for the program.] So it was just the four of us, really, working together. So everybody had to skip scenes during each day—of course we had the call sheets the day before—so we would just bring those sheets in and our script books. But we had to rehearse outside the doors to ourselves, because we wouldn't know in this show were we angry, were we sad, whatever. Jack liked to rehearse his vocally, and George always did his out of the way in his dressing room—but that Jack was very, very serious. Good actor."

Superman was not a show that offered much in terms of character development. Much like many of the shows at the dawn of television, the show thrived at giving its viewers everything they learned to expect:

Posing with Noel Neill, George Reeves proves he was super whether the cameras were rolling or not.

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George Reeves' thoughtful portrayal showed us all who Superman was meant to be, as captured in this iconic photograph.

that no matter what, Superman will always find a way to defeat evil. Yet, there were those occasional light hints of romance between Clark and Lois, a potential that was never realized apart from a few episodes like "The Wedding of Superman." In this particular installment, Lois Lane dreamt that she married Superman (and even knew his true identify as Clark Kent). In relation to these romantic overtures on the show, Neill replied, "Oh no. Not a bit, because the kids wouldn't have liked it anyway. *[laugh]* They don't want to see any 'mush!' *[laugh]* About the only scene where I had some feelings was in the 'Wedding of Superman.' Yes, and he had told that he and Clark Kent were the same person, whatever. So it was very sad when they woke me up and realized I was just reading all this mail that came in from a girl that did a fan column and I was just taking her place and read her mail and fell asleep and just dreamt that. So they came looking for me, worried about me that I hadn't come into work. So when Clark Kent came in I grabbed him and said 'I won't get married to you!' 'Lois, what's the matter with you!?' and of course, I shed a tear in that scene and that was the end of it. It was very, very sad. *[laugh]* That's as close as I came! *[laugh]*"

"No, how could there be any growth?" Larson elaborated. "In my case, there was comic growth. They wrote things especially for me to do, like 'Semi-Private Eye', in which I got to imitate Humphrey Bogart, the *Maltese Falcon*. And gulp in great happiness, do it with

The 2006 USPS Superman commemorative stamp.

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Elisha Cook Jr. who was in that film. There can't be any growth, you just keep up... We all liked each other, and I think there was a rapport with the actors, but there's no growth. I mean, there won't be in the new Superman film. Oh, when they tried to do a little bit of growth and do something in the Christopher Reeve films, do something about the environment, because Chris was very involved in environmental feelings and all, and they tried to do the last ones, but the films failed. They are what they are, so there wouldn't be growth."

Interestingly enough, while Ben Affleck was preparing to play George Reeves in the film *Hollywoodland,* he asked Jack Larson to say something immodest in regards to the show. Recalling the scenario, Larson remembered, "I didn't know quite what he meant. *[laughs]* I'd never been asked that, to be immodest—I didn't say this to him. What happened was, it was the most popular character on the show, understandably, at the time, because of the young audience, but it was not on a children's time slot. It came on at 7:30 at night on a weeknight. I won't be able to tell you it was Wednesday night or something like that, but it had a big children's audience, and they of course identified with Jimmy. Beginning in the '53 series, a lot of the shows are about Jimmy and they more and more built the shows largely with Jimmy. When that happened, the popularity, which I became very aware of, because suddenly I couldn't take the subway anymore in New York or go places I'd gone without having people following me or doing things that I wasn't pleased with. I didn't like it happening, and to tell you the truth, the identification with Jimmy Olsen, which happened almost instantly, I thought was going to be a nail in my coffin as the actor Jack Larson, and it turned out to be true. I thought I was just going to turn into Jimmy Olsen, which is what happened."

In 1954, the character of Jimmy Olsen had his very own comic book series chronicling his adventures and a fan club that children could join. "They brought out a comic book called *Superman's Pal, Jimmy Olsen*," told Larson, "and they used me to advertise the comic book in a lot of ways. I wasn't getting a lot of money, so I couldn't afford to answer the fan mail, which was a huge amount of fan mail, and they were doing it, and they took the mail and they said they'd take care of it, because Kellogg's was our sponsor, and Kellogg's got complacent. There was no photograph coming from me to these people writing in, so they took care of it. But what they did was, they sent out a kind of a postcard thing of a picture of me, which I signed 'Best wishes, Jack Larson.' Then underneath it, they wrote Jimmy Olsen and on the back, and it said, 'Watch for the *Jimmy Olsen* comic book.' And all of that... They used interviews with me in all their comic books saying watch for *Jimmy Olsen*. So I thought that because they were giving a certain percentage, some portion of a penny, to Phil Silvers for a *Sgt. Bilko* comic... I don't know what the exact dates of this were, but they were having comic books come out like *Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin,* and they got something, so I thought that maybe they should give me something—because they weren't giving me money to do the show, basically. I was under contract for $250 a week, six months of the year. But that became a sore point with them that I even brought it up. And it was out of the question. And with that something happened; I decided that any publicity I did for the show or *Jimmy,* and all these magazines when they'd do articles on me, who you're dating and all that kind of thing, and that anything would just further make me Jimmy Olsen and not work to my advantage as an actor. So I refused to do any interviews or post any photographs or anything like that. And this caused a lot of problems between me and the advertising agency and ABC and National Comics, DC, under Jack Liebowitz, since they personally produced the show."

Shortly after the *Superman* series, starting in the summer of 1957, George Reeves and Noel Neill teamed on a live vaudeville-type tour across the country. The show allowed George to pursue his passion for music by playing his bass and singing with a group that featured Ms. Neill's singing (and dancing) and Reeves' good friend, actor Natividad Vacio, on guitar, among other performers. At some point during the show,

Reeves also performed a skit with stuntman Gene LaBell that would see him tussle in Superman-like fashion against "Mr. Kryptonite." Unfortunately, this tour was cut short. Neill recalled, "We did do one big show, a fair date and so that was our crowning glory, but all the rest of the shows were not what we needed. We'd come in and they'd say, 'What are you here for?' It was so embarrassing for poor George. I think the last show... that was sort of the *coup de grâce,* we played to three people in the audience—a mother, father and their little boy. We did our whole show and George said, 'Well, pack up, we're heading back to L.A.' That was such a failure, it could have been... in fact George and I had talked about doing a record some time with his singing in Spanish, and I would do mine in English and talk about what he was doing. We never did get to it and he was just heartbroken over the whole thing."

Amazingly in 1959, the show was to return to production after it was thought to be over for good. Larson remembered, "I had gotten a telegram exercising my option. My contract was, as I said, twenty-six weeks, and no matter how [long] the hiatus was between in the years, all they had to do in this contract, which was approved by the Screen Actor's Guild, scandalously from my point of view, under Ronald Reagan, who was always for corporations, they approved it. All they had to do, legally, was to send me a telegram exercising their option on my services for twenty-six weeks, and I would have to reach them and report to work thirty days later. And that, they exercised their option, I knew I had to come back and shoot twenty-six more."

Sadly, Superman's return to television was not to be. With the tragic death of George Reeves on June 16th of 1959, *Adventures of Superman* drew to a close for good. No one could ever replace him in the role. After having directed three episodes of the series, Reeves was becoming more interested in working behind-the-scenes but was bound to return to his signature character. In his lifetime, Reeves had no idea how kind the future would be to his portrayal of Superman. The actor never really experienced the true adoration and admiration that generations would have for his performances as The Man of Steel. Faced with the weight of having portrayed a superhero and the shortsightedness of casting agents, the role was a burden to him. But history shows us that he is as well-remembered as a true titan in Hollywood lore. Had he endured, he would have seen the rich legacy that his role gave him, and seen for himself all the lives that he had touched on one of the most influential television shows of all time.

After the series went off the air, the one-hundred four installments (fifty-two respectively filmed in black-and-white and color) of the series ran endlessly in syndication for new generations to see. Despite continuously airing the fine performances of Jack Larson, Noel Neill, Phyllis Coates, Robert Shayne (as Inspector Henderson) and George Reeves—none of the actors have earned royalties from these programs since the mid-sixties. At one point in the history of television, *Superman*'s popularity in syndication was topped by only *I Love Lucy*. Neill explained, "We realized of course that they were not going to do any more *Superman* because of course what happened to George. Every agent that had a muscleman would drag him in and Ellsworth would say 'no, no, no.' They tried a Superpup, that didn't work; Superboy, that didn't work, and finally they just said, 'Well we've got enough for syndication.'"

For Phyllis Coates, the work with George Reeves is still something she has fond memories of. Ms. Coates said, "George was a great Superman. He filled the screen, he was Superman. Although the series we did was considered the raw series, but it was an adult series. This is what I hear from people, that they liked it because it applied to the older crowd, the more sophisticated kids."

After all these years, and being mostly dismissed as child's fare, the show has finally gotten its due. As Jack Larson pointed out, "The show is obviously very good and is really popular, and at last is getting in places like *The New York Times* in reviews. It was always popular, but we never got distinguished reviews. We're now getting that fifty years later. *[laughs]* It takes time, you know."

Trying to keep cool in his wool Super-suit, George Reeves makes friends with a fan.

Friends and co-stars, Reeves and Neill later toured parts of the US in 1957 with their own musical revue.

John Shea added a cunningness to his take on Lex Luthor while he and Superman (Dean Cain) both vied for the affections of Lois Lane (Teri Hatcher).

LOIS & CLARK: THE NEW ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN

No matter what happens in life, you can rest assured that Superman will be a hero who will always come back. So on September 12, 1993, Superman returned to television in the hour-long prime-time series called *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* on ABC Television. Unlike previous incarnations of Superman's cast of characters, this program went out of its way to modernize them with a bit more sex appeal. Actor Dean Cain played a Clark Kent that was bit more self-assured and fashionable; the actor's Superman was more street savvy, less of a goody two shoes. Where this series really shined was in giving Lois Lane a bit more spotlight by allowing actress Teri Hatcher to use not only her beauty, but a little humor and spunk to show some progression that Ms. Lane was keeping up with the times in the 1990s. The shake-up to the Superman story formula initially proved to be very successful with audiences and raved about by critics.

On September 13, 1993 actor Dean Cain hit the ABC airwaves as the Superman of the nineties.

The origins of *Lois & Clark* actually started within the offices of DC Comics in New York City. In remembering the development of the show, DC executive editor Mike Carlin (then-editor of Superman's comics line) said, "Jenette Kahn (DC Comics President at the time) and I put together a bible for something called *Lois's Planet*, and it was literally based on the kinds of soap operas which we had started putting in the *Superman* comic books at the time. Kind of after John Byrne relaunched it, it became a little more realistic Clark and Lois stuff, and then guys like (writer/artist) Jerry Ordway and (writer) Roger Stern and the team here kept adding to that, and Jenette really was enjoying the inter-personal stuff that we were doing and that that was a good angle for a weekly television show. And she pushed for it at Warner Brothers, and they finally went for it. And the bible that we put together was literally panels clipped out of our comics that

In their reimagining, the ABC network produced a steamier campaign that emphasized this wasn't your parents' Superman.

Former college athlete, Dean Cain took on the mantle of the Man of Steel in 1993.

LOIS & CLARK: THE NEW ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN ©Warner Bros. Television, a division of Time Warner Entertainment Company, L.P. All Rights Reserved.

helped them to decide to do it." Both Carlin and Kahn were able to review and make notes on the scripts during the series' run.

During the mid-eighties and early nineties, Superman went through major revisions that were designed to keep the character fresh—details in his origin and even aspects of his appearance were tweaked. With the changes came renewed interest in the characters as the romance between Lois and Clark Kent became a stronger part of the comic books. The producers of *Lois & Clark* took these changes to heart. Storylines focused on a budding relationship between Lane and Kent. Under executive producer and writer Deborah Joy LeVine, the first season of the show relied heavily on comedy and romance. It focused more on Clark and Lois than on fancy special effects to show off Superman and his roster of villains. Interestingly, this season was mostly a bizarre love triangle between Clark Kent, Lois Lane and a super suave Lex Luthor (as played magnificently by actor John Shea). Cleverly, the show initially preferred to show Clark and Superman using brains over brawn.

Carlin recalled, "I definitely think that the first season was more of the soap opera stuff that the world hadn't seen yet with Superman, and, again, I think budgetary limitations on a weekly show, and just where technology was back when *Superboy* and *Lois & Clark* were done, I think they had real limitations on doing the action/adventure stuff, and I thought it was wise to steer clear from that as much as they could, so that meant more time with the people. I think that worked out better. I think that as the stories got more ambitious and they went into outer space and they met all kinds of supervillains and things, I think the technology wasn't there yet to pull it off. That's why I think that now, ten years later, everything is ten years more improved. I mean, we didn't have a *Toy Story* yet, even. They can do a lot of stuff now."

Subsequently, as the show's plot actually advanced the relationship of Lois and Clark, this was reflected in the comics. So when it came time for the wedding of these two characters, DC and Jenette Kahn were able to coordinate this mega-event with the one in the TV show. In the '90s, Superman benefited royally from all the publicity that the comic had generated from

the wedding and the epic storyline in "The Death of Superman," but it went both ways as the television show would sometimes slightly impact on the stories of the comics as well.

Carlin said, "I think the death of Superman helped the comic line, and that in turn helped the show, and we actually coordinated Superman's return in the comic books for the same month the show debuted, and one of the reasons we gave Superman longer hair at the time was because Dean Cain had longer hair than Christopher Reeve. Not as long as what we were drawing, but we felt like that was a slight change to show that something was different without changing the costume, and that also, it was good coordination. So Superman was back just in time to be on network television. We were selling a million copies a week at that point, so it would have been really hard for anything to help us do better than that."

As the ABC network got more involved, the show shifted towards faster-paced action and a sprinkling of more Superman. Even with a modest following and more changes, the show came to an end on June of 1997. Its eighty-eight episodes endured in syndication and on DVD to all those curious in seeing this interesting take of a girl and the superhero man in her life. Also worth mentioning are the heartfelt performances from the show's terrific supporting cast: the late Lane Smith (as a more fatherly Perry White), Michael Landes (as Jimmy Olsen in the first season) and Justin Whalen (as Jimmy Olsen in the second to fourth seasons), and K Callan and Eddie Jones (as Clark Kent's adoptive mother and father).

Lois & Clark definitely marked the return of Superman on television. If this television series proved one thing, it was that Superman—especially in his true guise of Clark Kent—was still a character that was relatable. Despite all his strengths and powers, he was not so alien that he couldn't love the woman of his dreams, stand up for his friends in their time of need, or seek advice on matters that were close to his heart from the parents to whom he was endlessly devoted. No longer was he a mere alien from Krypton, but a true "Superman" that was brimming with compassion, personality and hope for the beautiful world that adopted him as its greatest champion. He'll always be the hero that will never let us down.

Although this was not her wedding dress, Lois Lane (Teri Hatcher) married Clark Kent (Dean Cain) in the series in an event paralleled with the *Superman* comics.

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chapter 3

BATMAN

You know his name, and you know his story. As a youngster, his parents were gunned down as victims of a cold-blooded crime. Ever since the tragedy, he's sworn and committed himself to fighting lawlessness and defending the helpless in his city. A master of combat, forensics and technology, the brilliant detective is feared by all evildoers that lurk in the night's mist. By day, he is the sophisticated billionaire playboy all of Gotham reads about in the headlines, who seems to be all about the fast cars, faster women and the finer things that money can buy. By night, he's a relentless and obsessive creature who remains undeterred in his tireless campaign that never ends. He's the Dark Knight of Gotham City. He is Batman.

Batman has been an enduring hero since his debut in the pages of *Detective Comics* #27 in 1939, when he was launched by his creators, twenty-two-year-old artist Bob Kane and twenty-five-year-old writer Bill Finger. The public's fascination with the characters would only increase in time with Batman, his boy sidekick Robin, their infamous endless line-up of interesting villains and the film noir environment that they've inhabited since. In 1943, the Caped Crusader was rushed to the big screen courtesy of a film serial from Columbia Pictures which pitted Batman (played by Lewis Wilson) and Robin (played by Douglas Croft) against the evil Dr. Tito Daka. A later lower budgeted serial series arrived on the big screen in 1949 entitled *Batman and Robin*, with Robert Lowery and Johnny Duncan in the respective lead roles of this kid-fare favorite.

By the 1950s, the invasion of television sets in the average American household would signal the end of the movie serial format as families now sought to spend less time in movie palaces and more time in front of their TV sets at home. Thus television apparently put a stop to Batman's presence on the big screen, for the time being. Although there was an effort in the early sixties to do a children's television show featuring future Tarzan Mike Henry as the hero, nothing ever came to fruition. Ironically, it would be at a viewing of the old serials at Chicago's Playboy Club in the early sixties where ABC executive Yale Udoff got the notion of having his network develop a show on Batman.

By the mid-sixties, Douglas Cramer, ABC's Vice President in Charge of New Program Development, spoke with veteran television producer William (Bill) Dozier about developing Batman as a television show. In an effort to bring something that would rejuvenate their television line-up, ABC had initially acquired the rights to the crimefighting character in the hopes of competing with lively popular family shows like *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, *The Munsters* and *Lost in Space* that drew away younger viewers from their network. With no knowledge of Batman or anything pertaining to comic books, a slightly nervous Dozier prepped himself by reading a handful of *Batman* comics. He did this in anticipation of a big meeting with the ABC network brass in New York City where he was to discuss his vision of the character's television show. Regardless that the producer initially found the comics to be rather silly and not necessarily something that would make engaging television, he soon realized that maybe simply "overdoing" the straight-laced image of this boy scout was a direction that could be humorous

to adults while younger viewers would be lured in by the action. Although the network brass wasn't overly enthusiastic at the big meeting with his angle for the show, the ABC executives were so determined to get *Batman* on the air that they gave the seemingly self-assured Dozier and his Greenway Productions their commitment to a series. 20th Century Fox would financially back and produce.

With a deal in place, Dozier immediately sent a telegram to Spain where his friend, screenwriter Lorenzo Semple Jr., was residing at the time. In later years, Semple would establish himself as one of the premier screenwriters in Hollywood by writing well remembered classics like *Papillon*, *Pretty Poison*, and *The Parallax View*. In Semple, Dozier knew that he had the person who, due to his sharp wit and intelligent sense of humor, could create the template and vision for the show. The producer and writer were owed a project by ABC after their previous effort (a pilot called *Number One Son*) was shelved despite the network's high opinion of it. In return ABC offered *Batman* to the team. "We met at the Ritz in Madrid," Semple recalled, "and [Dozier] pulled out the comic book *Batman*, which he was sort of dismayed by, because he didn't have any idea what to do. And I said, 'No problem, I'll write it,' and that was the extent of it."

A lot of people forget that the *Batman* comics of the time were filled with childish stories and concepts. The character had moved away from his film noir roots for stories about robots, aliens, space travel, time travel and various alternate realities and dimensions. The Caped Crusader's comic also included gimmicky, goofy characters like Bat-Hound, Batwoman and Bat-Mite, amongst others. The producer strayed away the fantastical elements of the comics to embrace more the crime-fighting aspects and the colorful cast of villains.

Ahead of its time, in an era when shows were meant to be played either overly serious or purely for laughs, *Batman* did a little bit of both very cleverly without seeming too hokey. It was also the first TV comedy shown without a laugh track. Even the novelty of having the sound effects literally spelled out on the television screen during a melee was a masterstroke that only the writer could conceive. From Spain, Semple served as "Executive Story Consultant" for the show; he would continue to write new scripts and oversee those written by other screenwriters. Semple commented, "We had trouble finding other writers at first, because people didn't quite get the show; they went too far out, or whatnot. This was a very special type of deadpan humor. Which I happen to be very sympathetic to, and it was easy for me. But some people had some trouble with it; ABC had no trouble with it at all. I went over once to New York and met with ABC, with a script, and they said, 'Great.' I mean, they shot it without any problem. They just shot it from the script, without any notes or anything. They said, 'Let's do it.'"

In the classic series, Batman (Adam West) and Robin (Burt Ward) were ready for whatever devilry may arise from their rogues' gallery.

The biggest success of the show came from its ability to successfully entertain on two levels without insulting the intelligence of its viewers: kids and adults could enjoy it for different reasons. The idea that Dozier might have had initially was taken to another level with Semple's sharp scripts. "It's one-dimensional, but a different one dimension," *[laughs]* Semple said in defining the tone within his vision for the show. "It really was for adults. I mean, in other words, my sense of humor, we weren't consciously thinking of kids. But obviously kids

Which way is up? Batman and Robin (Adam West and Burt Ward) size up one of their infamous building climbs.

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were going to like it. There's a lot of verbal humor in it, deadpan humor that kids wouldn't really get. I mean, I always remember lines that I especially liked about the first ones. I don't remember if they were in the pilot, but there was one where Batman was in a nightclub, and the maitre d' says, 'Table for two, Batman?' And Batman, who's dressed up in all his regalia, says, 'Yes, but please, not too near the music—I wouldn't want to be conspicuous.' *[laughter]* And, I mean, it was very funny, but it's not for kids.

In finding the perfect Batman, the show ultimately cast a relatively unknown working actor named Adam West. In him, Dozier immediately saw many of the qualities he was looking for—someone who wasn't just handsome and classy looking, but who could convey a very subtle hint of humor and a strong degree of conviction to his lines. In recalling how he was spotted by the producer, West said, "They discovered me in a Nestle's Quick commercial doing a James Bond spoof. It was 1965 and I shot this black-and-white commercial, and Bill Dozier saw the commercial, and they liked my wit, so they said something absurd at his physical abilities. And then Dozier later told me in his office, 'That's how we got *Batman*.' They saw that great spoof off of James Bond, who was big at the time before *Batman*. Because I looked good and I had that 'Batman' quality they were looking for. If you recall the commercial, I had that little life preserver around my waist that, as Captain Quick, I pulled the little string and the life preserver, which is a rubber duck, is filled with air, and I jumped off the helicopter and landed in the water. So they liked me from that commercial."

West embraced the part; any inhibitions or reservations that he might have had in putting on the costume quickly faded away. With time, it would become almost second nature to be Batman. "Once you put on that cowl," uttered West, "when you know you have the character nailed and you become aware of acceptance and trust with it—it becomes a natural activity. When you put on the cowl and costume with all those bits and pieces, one becomes the character."

As with Adam West, Dozier and his associates looked at many actors in search of the perfect Robin. As luck would have it, the "Boy Wonder" turned out to be a young twenty-something man who was, at the time, working in real estate. Burt Ward (then known as Bert Gervis) had no acting experience or film credits. Although a novice actor at the time, the rapport and chemistry between West and Ward in the auditions and on-screen was instantaneous, electric, and so obvious to Dozier that he couldn't break up this pairing. The spunky actor brought to life the energy and charisma that the teenaged Robin, The Boy Wonder [a.k.a. Dick Grayson] had in the pages of the comic books. Along with an all-American wholesome look, he had the physical prowess and infectious enthusiasm that naturally came as a result to being the sidekick of the coolest superhero ever created. The success of the show would take Ward by surprise and make him an instant favorite with television viewers.

Batman premiered on January 12, 1966 at 7:30 P.M. From the second its Bob Kane / Dick Sprang-inspired animated opening credits first aired, a euphoric wave of "Batmania" began with smitten viewers across the United States. ABC heavily pushed the show with an enormous wave of promotion and television spots that really created a lot of buzz. After a disastrous fall

Batman (Adam West), the face of justice in Gotham City.

A promotional handout from DC Comics with pre-printed signatures.

season in 1965, ABC hurried *Batman* into mid-season despite having the show slotted for their 1966 fall season. They needed something to stop their bleeding in the ratings. This show was also peculiar because it was structured as two-parters: a cliffhanger and its conclusion. Initially, the program was two half-hour episodes each week, on back to back nights.

With all the turmoil and cultural changes going on through the turbulent sixties, *Batman* became a great escape—smart and sexy, it was the one show that any person of any age, creed, religion or social/political outlook could agree to watch together. It enraptured an audience around the world instantly. It was the perfect escape from the very turbulent times of the war, the riots, the psychedelic and the quiet despair that the nation had been in since the assassination of President Kennedy. With its high production values, the show was as vivid and colorful as the comics themselves; it was one of the first programs tailored for the emerging market of color television sets. "You have to remember this was the sixties," said West, "*Batman* was groundbreaking. Nothing like it: before or after. One of the first shows on ABC to be in color! And who could ever forget Julie Newmar and her Catwoman costume."

The popularity of the show also impacted DC's comic line. It certainly raised Batman's popularity level for licensing. Noted comic book writer and historian Mark Waid said, "The average print run on *Batman* just before the TV show was 610,000 with a sell-through of about 50%. For the first issue that actually hit stands (#179, on-sale January 20, 1966) after the show's premiere (January 12, 1966), DC bumped the print run up to 625,000 at the last second (very unusual for a winter-release book, traditionally a low-sales period). It sold 450,000 for a 72% sell-through. *But*—for the first issue *printed* after the TV show's premiere and buzz (#180, on-sale March 3), the print run was bumped up to 875K (not the one million I remember) for a sell-through of 98%, an all-time Bat-record. (Clearly, the substantial print-run order bump was placed with Sparta after the premiere.) The next two regular issues (#182 was a giant, on which we have no data) were bumped up to 1,100,000 and 1,480,000 respectively, with sell-throughs of 85% and 81%, respectively. The reason #180 stands out as such a landmark to me is that it had the greatest sell-through percentage of any DC comics I've ever heard of."

Throughout the first season, Semple remained in Spain; he sent his scripts via Air Mail and remained in constant contact with Dozier and his producing assistant Charles B. Fitzsimmons. In this modern era of television, it is almost inconceivable that the head writer of a show isn't present on set (or at very least, the same city)—but there was trust as Semple had proven that

Avert your eyes, readers! No one must ever know Dick Grayson (Burt Ward) and Bruce Wayne's (Adam West) secret crimefighting personnas!

he was up to the task and always professional. He wrote the majority of the first season's adventures and oversaw the ones he didn't. "There wasn't anybody to give notes," stated Semple. "There was no other creative person. Again, I'm not boasting, but I'm just saying the way it was. Everybody else, Bill would occasionally, and I suppose other people occasionally had ideas, Charlie Fitzsimmons and other people, but also there was nobody else on what I call the creative end. There were no executive producers, (or) show runners. And so, basically, whatever changes were made were made for production reasons or on the set or something."

If there was a show runner to the program, it was William Dozier—the producer also served as the narrator for the series. He supervised the production and never settled for second best on anything. For whatever reasons, the high-style *Batman* became his most involved project, even with his successful history in developing properties for film and television, including a hand in TV staples like *The Donna Reed Show* and *Bewitched*. West said, "Bill Dozier had a great talent for mixing talents; a charming man who lived well. He had a circle of friends in Hollywood. Many of those friends were guest stars on the show: Tallulah Bankhead, Vincent Price, Anne Baxter, Cesar Romero, Burgess Meredith, almost Frank Sinatra, Van Johnson. Dozier's guidance and the ability to hire great people. Dozier had great taste. The colors were new and exciting for 1966 TV, because, if you'll recall, color TV was just happening around then. So when you have Dozier's guidance, great scripts, the ability to hire legendary stars, with these wonderful costumes, and then the music by Neal Hefti, that all came to one in the sixties with Bond, Beatles, and *Batman*." Oddly enough, actress Jill St. John as Molly, The Riddler's moll, in the pilot was the only character to ever die on the show when she fell into a nuclear reactor.

Cesar Romero as The Joker.

Burgess Meredith as The Penguin.

Julie Newmar as The Catwoman.

Bring on the Bat Baddies:

Gotham produced an unusual amount of misguided citizenry who made Batman and Robin their ultimate target. The villains came at the twosome with incredibly convoluted plans of mayhem, assaulting the team with chaotic taunts, ridiculous riddles and tempting purrs. Among them were the Penguin (Burgess Meredith), who always had his beak in some notorious scheme; The Riddler (Frank Gorshin), with his never-ending queries and quotes, who fought Batman with his mitts as much as his wits; the alluring and unforgettable Catwoman (Julie Newmar), a purr-fect villainess with a soft spot for a certain caped crusader; to lastly, The Joker (Cesar Romero), the team's most infamous thorn, who relentlessly haunted our heroes with his vicious laughter. Amongst a sea of villainy in the city of Gotham, these four were the most dangerous.

Frank Gorshin as The Riddler.

On the Minstrel's (actor Van Johnson) menu this fine evening: Slow-Roasted Caped Crusaders à lá carte. From the second season episodes "The Minstrel's Shakedown / Barbecued Batman?"

Afterwards, Batman quipped, "What a way to go-go."

Once West had the character of Batman defined to his liking, along with a positve reaction to the very first show from the viewers, he was allowed to open up and have a great deal more creative input. Producer Bill Dozier and his team were always receptive to West's ideas for the show and his character. West commented, "Yes. I rewrote many of the lines in the scripts, and I added nuances to the character that the writers didn't think of. For example: Batman's rhythm of speech, his pattern of speech. There was always an urgency in Batman's diction, 'To the Batcave, Robin! To the Batpole!' There was always an urgency. When I stood in Commissioner Gordon's office talking to Chief O'Hara, I crossed my arms a certain way, the same way a bat crosses his arms. I had to be aware of the cape. If you look at many of the episodes, you will see at times the cape is draped behind my shoulders, and many times it is over my shoulder. I used the cape to make the scene more dramatic. Also, in wearing the cowl my vision was restricted, so I walked a certain way, which became the 'Batman walk.'"

The show benefited from colorful supporting performances from by the straight-laced Neil Hamilton (Commissioner Gordon), hearty Stafford Repp (Chief O'Hara), doting Madge Blake (Aunt Harriet) and British actor Alan Napier as Bruce Wayne's imperturbable butler. The show featured an endless array of actors and actresses as guest stars. "Many favorite co-stars," West said, "Burgess Meredith (The Penguin), who when I was a child growing up was a major star when I was growing up. Cesar Romero (The Joker), another major star when I was growing up. George Sanders, one of my favorite characters on *Batman*, the original and the first, Mr. Freeze. My favorite line from that episode is that Mr. Freeze asks Batman, 'Baked Alaska, Batman?' That was funny in writing. Who can forget my three Catwomen? The sexy Julie Newmar, Lee Meriwether for our *Batman* movie, and Eartha Kitt in our third season. And Frank Gorshin (The Riddler), who did our pilot, which was our first and second episode, and many other episodes during the first season and was in the third season. Out of all the actors that were on the show, Frank and I became the closest. We would see each other off the set at parties and Hollywood gatherings."

Batman marked the first time that West headlined a show. But the pressure of constantly shooting episodes and promoting the program was hard work that never really allowed the actor the time to bask in his sudden fame. Bat-related products and public interest exploded in 1966, with an avalanche of goods and great demand for anything remotely related to Batman. West said, "It was gratifying to play the lead character, to have the challenge of carrying the title role and to be enjoyed by so many. There were many enjoyable moments. I never really thought much about stardom, just getting work done and getting paid. You have to remember, this was the sixties, where it was not unusual to do 30, 33, 35, sometimes 36 shows in a season! Compared to the shows of today, where you do 20. So there was a lot of pressure on me to know all the scripts. It was not unusual that you're working on three or four scripts at the exact same time because we had to film these so fast."

Via pressure from Twentieth Century Fox, there was an urgency to rush an original theatrical film to cash in on the popularity of the show. The film was shot while the show was on hiatus, and by the time the film was ultimately released on August 3rd of 1966, the Batman craze was starting to subside. Semple, who penned the screenplay of the theatrical release, said, "[Twentieth Century] didn't have any idea what they had. They just had no idea this was the beginning of the gold mine it could have been. Yeah, I wrote the movie in about two weeks. At that time, 1966, whenever it came out, they rushed it out to cash in, they thought. And some other movies were out that were made from a series. They paged together some episodes. I remember *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* put together four episodes and called it a movie.

Batman (Adam West) and Batgirl (Yvonne Craig) debate her role in Gotham, from the pilot/screen test for Batgirl.

Girl Power! A much needed female touch arrived in season three as Batgirl (Yvonne Craig) kicked her way into the hearts of boys and girls.

Batman, most people just thought it was a bunch of episodes strung together as a movie. They just figured they get an extra twenty bucks out of it. You know Fox. They didn't realize they had something."

"Those shows were always fun to write," said Semple. "It's so stupid I didn't keep the [scripts]. I wrote Bat-notes that I gave all the other writers... I guess I wasn't around for some of the second season. I mean, I was never there regularly. But the scripts, I thought, got very silly, as people came in trying to make more outré villains. And it just got, you know, it was a one-joke show, kind of, and it got stupider." All of the episodes written by the witty pen of Semple rank among the show's best. His contributions to the first and second seasons of *Batman* helped make the show legendary.

"The show drifted away in its final season," said Adam West, about the inevitable end of the series. "There was a creative fatigue, and they were anxious to go to syndication. It was just too expensive [to produce]. Once you reach over a hundred episodes, you go in something called syndication, and at that point in our third season, *Batman* was closing with 120 episodes, 20 more than what you need for syndication, and our costs of doing the show were so expensive, from the innovative costumes to the Batmobile designed by George Barris, and the guest stars. ABC canceled the show and we were going to be picked up by NBC for another season or two, but they destroyed all the sets and NBC didn't want to spend the money and redo the sets, so we all just left."

By the fall season of 1967, the two-part structure was put aside for only one episode per week. The show's success and ratings were now in rapid decline; it never again experienced the frenzy and ratings it witnessed during the first season. The audience appeared weary after almost two years of two episodes per week. The stagnation of the second season and the backlash from the media overexposure in the public consciousness were taking their toll. Fall of 1967 also saw the addition of Batgirl (played by Yvonne Craig) in the hopes of bringing something new to keep viewers tuned in. The final episode of *Batman* aired on March 14, 1968 despite the fact that children never stopped watching the show—ironically, a demographic of viewers that TV executives would kill for today. Upon completion, the library of the cheery series consisted of 120 episodes that successfully endured for decades in syndication. In later years, Dozier would say *Batman* would never have even aired if ABC

Batman found Batgirl a real knockout!

Another striking pose as Batgirl (Yvonne Craig) spreads her wings.

hadn't already bought it, because (at the time), it was the lowest rated tested show on television.

Perhaps the most memorable moment in the show is one from the very first episode where *Batman* launched a new dance. West reminisced, "The Batusi—a flash of Fred Astaire and goofy brilliance. It was our first episode. They wanted Batman to dance, and our director and choreographer gave me a dance. But I didn't like it. It's something Batman would never have done. So at the time the Watusi was the number one dance. So I just named it the Batusi and I did my own special moves that I thought Batman would do. The dance caught on. It became a national dance craze. And in the movie *Pulp Fiction*, John Travolta does the Batusi."

It's more than forty years since *Batman* first aired—but it never really went away from the public consciousness. It is still fondly remember by every generation that has watched it since its debut. The show was a living, breathing comic book. Semple added, "Sophisticated viewers realized it was a very witty show. I think everybody intelligent that I know loved *Batman*, and there's still writers to this day... My daughter's boyfriend is George Meyer. He's the soul of *The Simpsons*, and always has been, from the beginning. He and other writers that I know say *Batman* was a big inspiration to all of them—also, Buck Henry with *Get Smart*. There were two or three shows like that that were immediately recognized, if I may say, by smart people as being very smart shows."

Like many of us, writer Mark Waid was inspired by the classic show. Waid stated, "The show was everything to me. Had I not loved it, had I not been encouraged by my father to watch it and read the comics, I'd be a CPA today. And I never looked down upon it, not even as I grew older; that it was a camp interpretation didn't bother me. Frankly, that constant bellyaching about how the show so 'betrayed' the 'real' *Batman* is always, always made by people who've either never gone back and read the 1965-1966 *Batman* comics or have false memories of them, because if you go back and read those books, the stories were no more sophisticated than the TV show was. The show was one hell of a lot more faithful an adaptation of the Bat-books of the era than anyone seems to want to recall."

Batman and Robin in their classic 1960s looks as illustrated by Carmine Infantino and Murphy Anderson.

For many involved with the show, *Batman* only brought years of typecasting and stigma in securing new roles after the series. If anybody was most affected from the burden of the show, it was Adam West. Despite his hopes that he could find the next big role that would allow the public to see him beyond *Batman*, he was never given the opportunity to prove casting agents wrong. From the mid-eighties to the present day, an entire new generation of Hollywood players that loved West's acting and charisma would bring forth a bit of resurgence in his popularity and his own self-confidence. From every corner of the globe, the actor began to see that he was loved by a loyal group of fans that had never forsaken him. While some actors might have had more roles or financial windfalls, West has a richness that most actors will never have: immortality. He never really faded away from the public consciousness because there's an audience of millions that has never forgotten the joy and entertainment that he gave them through their television sets. *Batman* had a huge influence in that it showed you could do superheroes in prime time TV. Yes, today's superhero films, however, owe more to the popularity of *Star Wars* and the rise of the "event movie" mentality of the 1970s. But this show is still vital to today's modern hero films, to the comics and to the endurance of the genre, because it put these heroes on the map. It's unlikely that the genre would still be around today if not for this show—but to simply classify it as mere "camp" is a complete misnomer. Chip Kidd, author of several books on Batman, said, "At this point they should just retire that whole word. It's just tiresome and unimaginative to describe the show that way. There's plenty of argument over what 'camp' actually means. Susan Sonntag wrote an essay on it, 'Notes on Camp,' and it's very different from what people say the *Batman* TV show is, in a way that people use the word 'kitsch' pretty much to describe anything."

In time, West came to the realization that it wasn't such a bad thing to be associated with Batman. Adam said, "There aren't too many actors who get the chance to create a signature role that is so widely accepted from generation to generation. The show is in its fortieth year, and I'm stopped everywhere I go, talking about *Batman*, and so many catch-phrases. And when we have our 'Battie' conventions, much like Shatner with his Trekkie conventions, I get to travel the world and meet these marvelous fans who know almost more about the show than I do. And everybody has their favorite scenes, may it be Batman and Catwoman, may it be Batman and The Riddler, Batman and The Joker, Batman and the evil Chandell [a villain played by Liberace], Batman and Archer. They all have their favorite episode. So it's gratifying to know, forty years later, the show is still playing, we're getting

From *Detective Comics* #352. ©1966 DC Comics. All Rights Reserved.

Writer Frank Miller and artist Jim Lee defined a new, grittier Dynamic Duo in *All-Star Batman and Robin*.

All-Star Batman & Robin #1. ©2008 DC Comics. All Rights Reserved.

rewards for all the work, and I have generations of fans that adore the show."

One who wasn't affected by its heavy shadow was its head writer. "No, it wasn't a detriment [to my career]," stated Semple. "Believe me, I could have cashed in a lot more. I barely had an agent. In these days, I'd get a huge overall deal, blah, blah. All that stuff. But I never went on to do more television, as you notice. I mean, I could have... Like everybody, the idea was to get out of television as quickly as possible. In those days it was considered ignominious and below anybody. And, actually, I'm probably quite well suited to television in temperament. And, I mean, I certainly could have made an overall deal to develop shows, but I never took one step in that direction. It's hard to imagine having somebody who, again... Like I said, there were a couple of weeks when we had the number one and number two rated shows, I mean, Wednesday and Thursday, whatever they were. And to have that sort of success and not cash in one bit on it is pretty amazing, is pretty remarkable. It shows how casual I was about it all."

For Lorenzo Semple, the work on the show was an experience that allowed him a very successful career. More importantly, the experience of working on such a fondly remembered classic remains something that the veteran writer of Broadway, movies and television will always cherish. "Every word of it was fun," Semple firmly stated. "I thought *Batman* was the real fun, to tell you the truth. It was an incredibly fun thing that we did a long time ago. I still feel it was the best things I ever wrote, by a long shot."

Like Paul Newman and Robert Redford as Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, Adam West and Burt Ward are forever linked together as Batman and Robin. "Burt Ward and I had the instant chemistry on stage," said West about his partner in crime-fighting. "It's aging like fine wine. Most recently, William Shatner introduced us and gave us the prestigious TV Land Award to both Burt and I that aired on the *TV Land Awards*. It was fun to see Bill (Shatner) again, and I believe it's the third time together on the same stage in the last forty years. Two icons in Burt—really three, sharing the same stage. And Burt's a lot of fun. I see him at conventions. We're doing a reality show together. And we did our 2003 Batman Movie of the Week together, called *Return to the Batcave*, that was on CBS for the Sunday night movie. It was fun to create those roles again. I don't see as much of Burt as I saw of Frank Gorshin, but our relationship is aging like fine wine."

In the November of 2007, *Entertainment Weekly Magazine* proclaimed West as a true TV icon in their top 100 list of the greatest television stars of all time. Today, no matter where Adam West goes on this planet, he is instantly recognized and showered with affection. And from the second you hear his distinct voice, dry sense of humor and that uncanny delivery, you can't help feeling overjoyed with a rush of coolness. Regardless of the actors that have portrayed Batman before him or after, in television or film, West will forever be the only Batman.

In closing, we couldn't help asking Mr. West, the greatest TV crime-fighter of them all, this riddle: How does it feel to be a living legend?

West's response: "It's just great, especially the 'living' part."

Spotlight on: The Batmobile

George Barris and his iconic auto.

There's isn't a car in the entire world that's more recognizable and prized than the 1966 TV Series Batmobile! When William Dozier, Batman producer extraordinarie, needed someone to build Batman's mighty ride, he hired George Barris, "The King of Kustomizers," to create the Caped Crusader's classic car. No stranger to Hollywood, Barris has created many iconic cars in television shows. Through the magic of the tube, the Batmobile has become a big part of everybody's life—whether you are five or seventy-five years old, this is a car that immediately ignites your heart and imagination.

"When I walked in there," George Barris said, in recalling his initial meeting, "[William Dozier] came in and said 'I've got to have a 20th century Batmobile today, in 1966.' I looked at him and I said 'Let me see the format of the show.' He showed me the pilot, he showed me the different things and as soon as I saw that 'Pow!' 'Bang!' 'Wow!' and all the stuff he was doing, I said 'The car has got be enjoyable, it's got to be creative, it's got to follow the format of the show as a star. It cannot be a monster, it cannot be a police car or...' It's got to be a funny crimefighter, and it still had to be a Batmobile. Bob Kane, who originated *Batman*, he made Batmobiles with cut-out bat faces glued on the front of a Lincoln Zephyr, something like that. You see, his creativity went into the characters and the cars didn't really have an awful lot of... he made some different ones in the different years, but nothing that followed the theme of what I was doing."

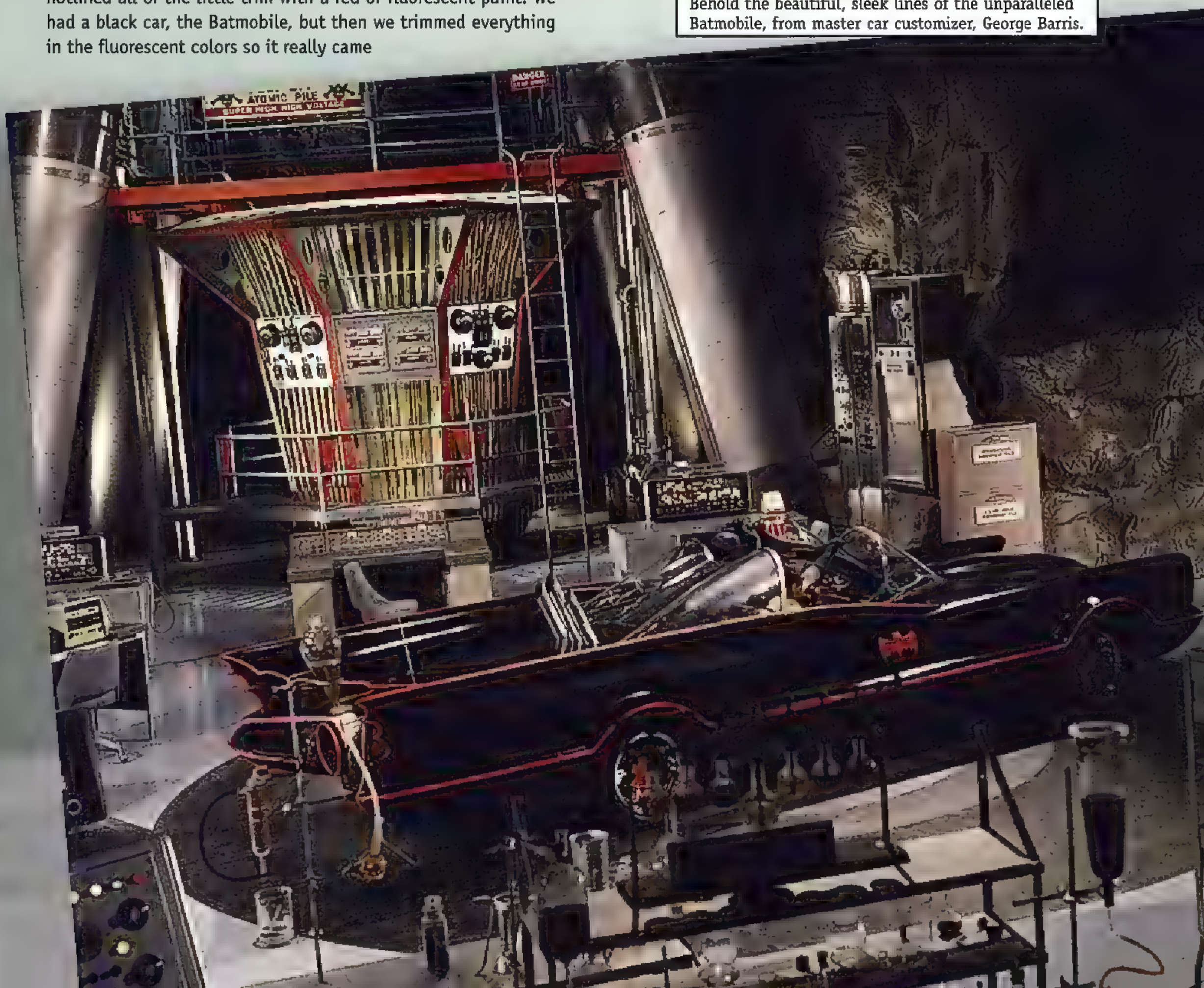
Within three weeks (and a $15,000 budget), Barris built a car that was full of life and character, which instantly gained the approval of Dozier, Adam West and the show's art directors. The sleek car was built from a 1955 Lincoln Futura concept car, on which the molds were removed with the customizer building the rest of the car to his vision. "So in creating a 20th century Batmobile," Barris said, "with crimefighting elements of what the show had in constant, it didn't mean that you had to shoot big guns out or things like that. Instead of that, we squirted oil out of the back so The Riddler would skid out as he was following, or we'd throw nails out of the back end at The Joker so the tires would go flat. I had rocket tubes that would send up, we had the front end that, actually the design standard for the front end were the headlights became the ears, the nose and the hood still came down the center of the car, which had a chain slicer come out of it. The grilles were on right and left which had gas nozzles made out of sprinkler heads. People looked at those sprinkler heads and said, 'Well those look like my sprinklers I have on my lawn!'"

Barris continued, "It made them laugh because it's true. It was sprinkler heads! But it also squirted out gas because that's what a sprinkler head does. That's the purpose of doing what we did. From there, I carried the fenders on back and then it went into a series of fifteen-foot Bat scalps for the rear fenders, and the fenders would open up for the wheels and so on.

Then it went into the back with a projection that went into a "V" then had a jet tube back there as if it had a turbine engine, which it didn't. All we had was a routine butane Betz blower with a fan that would blow smoke and fire out of the back. Then we had two parachutes. Parachutes for stopping or for turning. We'd pop the parachutes and turn to the right, we'd pop the parachutes and we'd stop. Then in the center we had an arch. We had double bubbles because you had Adam and Burt, Batman and Robin, and they just jumped over the door and into their car. We had the lights, emergency lights, the sprinklers, the Bat-turns, Bat-scopes, and all kinds of funny things fell into the scope of what was going to be done for the show, and that's what made them famous. Because we made that car for two things: it'll make you laugh, and then to do something completely opposite of what anybody else had done. We hotlined all of the little trim with a red or fluorescent paint. We had a black car, the Batmobile, but then we trimmed everything in the fluorescent colors so it really came out and punched at you. So when it's coming at you it's got the wild looking colors and had the different things that it does. That's why today it is still voted as the number one car in television and motion pictures."

Throughout the filming of the show, Barris would always be on-set; he would receive only $150 a day from the producer for the use of the car he designed and owned. Today, the one and only original Batmobile (from the television series) can be found on display at Barris Kustom City in North Hollywood, California. It is said to be valued, by Grundy Insurance, at five million dollars. At Barris Kustom City, visitors from all over the world have the opportunity to forever enjoy the Batmobile and the rest of the Barris Hollywood Star Cars.

Behold the beautiful, sleek lines of the unparalleled Batmobile, from master car customizer, George Barris.



chapter

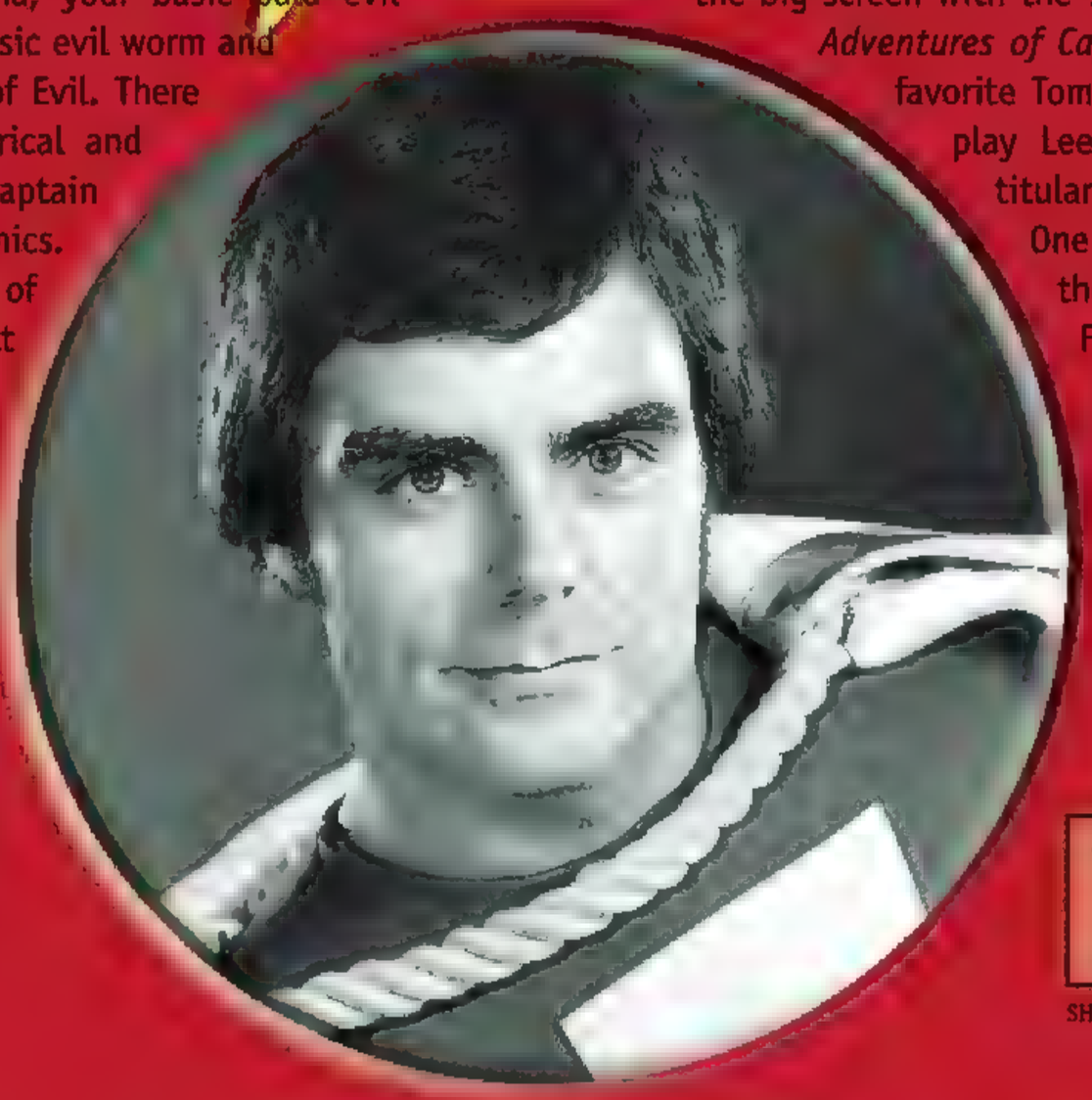
4

SHAZAM!

When twelve-year-old Billy Batson says the magic name of the wizard, Shazam, he transforms into the caped superhero named Captain Marvel, the world's mightiest mortal—his fans, affectionately, and his enemies, unaffectionately, have nicknamed him The Big Cheese. Becoming Marvel through a strike of lighting, he is bestowed with all the powers of six great mythological deities and transformed from the body of a boy to a man—the word "Shazam" is an acronym for Solomon, Hercules, Atlas, Zeus, Achilles and Mercury. The comic-book stories of curious boy reporter Billy Batson were simple tales without any heavy realism. Magic and imagination were all over the page and in the art. Supported by a colorful cast of characters—like his intelligent tiger friend, Tawky Tawny and his beloved sister Mary Marvel—Captain Marvel battled criminals like Dr. Thaddeus Bodog Sivana, your basic bald evil scientist, and Mr. Mind, your basic evil worm and leader of the Monster Society of Evil. There was no book as magical, satirical and fantastical as those starring Captain Marvel in the Golden Age of comics.

Debuting in the pages of *Whiz Comics* #2 from Fawcett Publications in 1940, Captain Marvel was created by artist C.C. Beck and writer Bill Parker. He immediately became a sales success that rivaled (and even eclipsed, at times) Superman during the Golden Age of comic books. It was the perfect book for children daydreaming of being an adult and having the strength they so desperately craved. Kids of the forties and fifties felt more of a connection with Billy Batson than they ever did with the Man of Steel—despite the similarities between the two caped titans—because he triggered a sense of zest and awe. When the paper restriction put in place due to World War Two was removed, Fawcett spun off The Marvel Family (Captain Marvel Jr., Mary Marvel, amongst others) into a series of other books. Under Beck's whimsical, cartoony art style, writer Otto Binder's guidance and the contributions of many memorable artists, these stories were full of adventure, humor, and charm and built upon the ongoing continuity and mythology.

Captain Marvel became the first live-action superhero on the big screen with the 1941 Republic movie serial *The Adventures of Captain Marvel*, starring B-movie favorite Tom Tyler (in 1943, he would also play Lee Falk's *The Phantom*) in the titular role of the twelve-part saga. One could argue that because of the Big Red Cheese's popularity, Fawcett found itself in a court battle with National Periodical Publications/DC Comics. National felt that Captain Marvel was too similar to their Superman and took Fawcett to court for copyright infringement. In 1953,



Shazam! marked the first Saturday morning live-action adaptation of a major comic hero. Jackson Bostwick is pictured here in a CBS network publicity still.

SHAZAM! ©Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. All Rights Reserved.

In all his mighty splendor, Captain Marvel (Jackson Bostwick) awaits his next Saturday morning TV adventure.

The three leads, Mentor (Les Tremayne), Billy (Michael Gray) and Captain Marvel (Jackson Bostwick).

Fawcett agreed to retire Captain Marvel and to a payout of $400,000 as part of a settlement with DC. Captain Marvel historian P.C. Hamerlinck noted, "Fawcett never actually 'lost' the battle; there was never a final judgment from a jury or anything—it was simply long, ongoing, and, according to VP Roscoe Fawcett, they didn't want to put any more money into it, so they agreed to settle the matter out of court, pay National $400,000 and agree not to publish CM anymore." So for almost twenty years, Fawcett's comic characters remained dormant. In 1973, DC Comics, ironically, revived the Captain for a new series named *Shazam!* C.C. Beck returned to helm the art of his creation for the first ten issues.

In 1974, Filmation successfully brought Captain Marvel to the small screen for CBS' Saturday morning line-up. Filmation was an animation company founded by the producing team of Lou Scheimer and Norm Prescott. Amongst their biggest cartoons shows were the popular *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids* and the eighties staple *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe*. For Scheimer and Prescott's company, *Shazam!* would be their first venture into producing a full live-action program.

"We did a whole bunch of stuff with National Periodicals," recalled Lou Scheimer. "That's how we first got started on network television, and I got the rights to Captain Marvel. I had always loved Captain Marvel as a superhero, as a comic book, when I was a kid... National Periodicals could not use the name 'Captain Marvel' as the name of the show or the comic book, so they had to call it 'Shazam.' It's very interesting, because I got the rights, and I went to CBS because we had been very successful at CBS for many years. It was probably in the early seventies when we did that. I went back to New York and I had to deal with a guy named Fred Silverman, who really created the whole concept of Saturday morning with the cartoons on all day. I said to Freddy, 'Hey, I got the rights to a terrific property, and I'd like to talk to you about it before I talk to anyone else about it,' because we had done most of our work for them [CBS]. And I told him what we wanted to do with Captain Marvel, with *Shazam*, and he said, 'Can you do it live?' And I said, 'Oh, yeah! Of course we can do it live!' And I wondered how we could figure that out later on."

SHAZAM! With but one magic word, young Billy Batson (Michael Gray) becomes the hero Captain Marvel (Jackson Bostwick).

In the years since Fawcett's comics downfall, Marvel Comics had created a new hero named Captain Marvel and appropriately registered a trademark for that name. Thus, creatively, the show as well as future projects with the Big Red Cheese usually bear his dynamic magic word as their title, "Shazam!" Once committed, the intuitive producers immediately tried to figure out how they could do a superhero show on relatively small budget. To give the hero flight, they became one of the first television shows to incorporate blue screening, with effective results. With a budget under $100,000 per episode, the producers put every cent the network gave them into achieving the glossy look needed for the children's show. Also, the producers weren't going to test market the show; rather they trusted their intuition. Added Scheimer, "No, none of that. No, we actually used our own heads. Oh, God, when I think of testing, and going through all that crap, bringing twelve kids in and see if they liked it. In those days, nobody did anything like that. You know what? It doesn't work, anyway."

In their search for an actor to play Captain Marvel, the producers and their associates hoped to find an actor that was not only dashing, but one who demonstrated power and presence. After seeing hundreds of hopefuls, they found those qualities in a young actor named Jackson Bostwick. "I had just signed with a new commercial agent," said Bostwick, "and was sent out a week later for a Captain Marvel 'cereal' (being it was a commercial agent that sent me out, I naturally thought it was a breakfast cereal, like Cap'n Crunch) so knowing the 'cattle call' mentality usually associated with commercial auditions, I dressed accordingly to face a thundering herd of actors—jeans, white T-shirt, and cowboy boots. I didn't realize until I was being interviewed by the producer of the show, Robert (Bob) Chenault, that, 'cereal,' was in fact, serial, in the spirit of the old Republic Studios serial of the '30s and '40s... Bob Chenault said he liked my size (6' 3", 217 lbs), voice, and smile. I, also, showed him a couple of photos of me doing flying side kicks from my martial arts training, and he made the comment that it looked like that I could already fly without using wires."

Fresh from graduating the University of Southern California with an MFA in acting, he was not only excited about earning his first lead role, but looking forward to playing a character whose adventures he'd enjoyed in his youth. His immediate gravitation was towards making the hero true to the one in comics he'd read as a child. Bostwick recalled, "At the time, I think I was more concerned with the authenticity of the look and the fit when I first put the complete costume on than I was with any emotional involvement. The folks at Western Costume had done a magnificent job with the details and colors, and I just stood there in front of their mirror admiring the handiwork. During the show, I never really looked at myself as the actor playing the part, but more like I was watching somebody else who I would constantly critique on their portrayal of the good Captain."

Playing the part of Billy Batson was the spunky, young actor Michael Gray, alongside veteran actor Les Tremayne in the role of his wise companion/teacher who went simply by the moniker "Mentor." The roster of directors and writers behind the show consisted of experienced Hollywood veterans, like director Arthur H. Nadel (the director of Elvis Presley's *Clambake*), Hollingsworth Morse (one of TV's top episodic directors) and producer/director Robert Chenault, who helped set the tone during the first season of the production (which was shot in Greater Los Angeles). Some of the slight alterations to the premise included making the character of Batson a little older and having him travel in a van helping others with Mentor by his side instead of an elderly wizard.

Being that *Shazam!* was a Saturday morning show in the seventies, the stories within the program were morality lessons for children, with an emphasis on trying to show the difference between right and wrong. Most episodes involved Batson and Mentor trying to steer others away from trouble, with Captain Marvel always coming in towards the climax of the show to save the day from the inevitable danger. The scenes when Captain Marvel appeared were the most magical moments of the show—not only because of his powerful presence, but because it was usually in those moments when wrongdoers had the epiphany that what they were doing was wrong.

"I never preached or talked down to the kids," commented Bostwick, "both on the show or in the audience. I always kept in mind that I was their big brother and friend and wanted them to understand that they could always feel safe to trust Captain Marvel with their well being and that he'd always be with them in

Once a sales rival to Superman, DC reintroduced Captain Marvel to children in the seventies.

As if riding a cloud, Captain Marvel (Jackson Bostwick) arrives to save the day.

Actress JoAnna Cameron played the Goddess Isis, a character created for TV who shared a few crossover adventures with Captain Marvel.

spirit when they were left all alone and facing their fears. Exactly what Clayton Moore's Lone Ranger inspired in me."

Did the actor enjoy the moral lessons that were integral to the show? Bostwick answered, "In most cases, I did. After all, this was a Saturday morning show aimed at the kids. That said, I must comment that I do not go along with the language and bias policing of our literature along with the manipulation of world history, in order to satisfy a very elitist academia, or a lofty socialistic agenda. This politically correct mentality was rapidly beginning to flower in the late '60s and early '70s and has only worsened up through the present day. I am very much against censorship of any kind that's run amok."

Shortly into the filming of the second season, Jackson Bostwick was replaced by the executive producers with actor John Davey. Despite the novel effort from Davey, following Bostwick wasn't an easy feat, because of how extremely popular and recognizable he was with the children that enjoyed *Shazam!*

"It was always about finances," said Bostwick, about his departure as Captain Marvel, "and the totally misinterpreted, misconstrued conjecture that I was absent from the set one morning for the sinister purpose of stopping production because I was holding out for more money. Hah! When in fact, I was at the doctor's office (even had the nurse inform the studio to that effect—which was categorically denied by them that the message was ever received) having my eye examined from an injury that I had incurred on the set doing a takeoff the previous day. However, I soon became aware of this unfortunate and rather devilish dish that must have been simmering for me for some time deep down in the studio hierarchy kitchens, when, unceremoniously, I had the whole murky mess dumped on my head at 1:00 o'clock in the afternoon that same day. My replacement was out on the set by 3:00 o'clock, just two hours later. Hmmmm."

The actor concluded, "Anyway, the windup is, the Screen Actors Guild arbitrated this precedent-setting case, which we won, and Filmation had to compensate me for all the episodes I was set to be used on, plus residuals. The entire affair should have never occurred. Stupid, stupid, stupid! I, also, go into greater detail with this whole disingenuous mess (with actual photos of the stunt accident) in my book, *Myth, Magic and a Mortal*."

When the second season premiered in 1975 the show was retitled as *The Shazam!/Isis Hour*. Captain Marvel was now paired with a spin-off show called *Isis*, featuring an original female heroine played by actress JoAnna Cameron. "We created another character called Isis," said Scheimer. "It was a female superheroine, and we had them back-to-back, and then we had them work together as a team. And that was ours [Filmation], totally. I mean, we created a myth, developed the concept, then I went back to CBS and I said, 'Hey, wouldn't it be nice to have

For *Shazam!'s* second season, actor John Davey took over the role of Billy Batson's (Michael Gray) more heroic side.

a live-action superheroine?' And Freddy [Silverman] said, 'Yeah, that's a terrific idea.' And then we had her appear in some of the shows, actually cross over... Well, everybody thought that *Isis* couldn't work. I said, 'We find somebody with beautiful legs, it'll work.'"

Isis gave Filmation a property that belonged to them completely, unlike *Shazam!* (which was licensed). They even managed to do three crossover episodes with *Shazam!* in the John Davey run. About the birth of the character, Scheimer said, "Well, [writer] Mark Richards was working for us doing some comedy stuff [for Filmation], and I said, 'Let's talk about doing something with a lady.' He came up with the idea... of a woman who was an archaeologist who ran across this ancient symbol and picking up a pyramid in Egypt and got all these powers from it. I said, 'Hey, that's a pretty good idea!' I mean, there's nothing quite like that. She gets her powers from it. Well, you know the way the thing... Hey, do you know what? She was Indiana Jones before Indiana Jones! She was Indiana Jane."

By the end of September in 1977, *Shazam!* would end its run after extensive airplay; respectively, the Big Red Cheese had a total of 28 episodes, while *Isis* had 22 entries. Reruns of *Isis* would continue to air on CBS under a new title, *The Secrets of Isis* for another year; *Shazam!* reran briefly in 1980. Scheimer pointed out, "The plan was to be on the air as long as possible. *[laughs]* The competition was fierce in those days, and it was difficult to keep a show on the air because if you got a thirty, forty share, which today would be extraordinary, that wasn't good enough. I mean, we had shows like *Fat Albert* with a sixty percent share of the audience."

"There are so many," uttered Bostwick, about his favorite memories with show's fans, "but I do recall one that was fun. Rodney Allen Rippey, a very young black child actor, was doing a very popular Jack-in-the-Box commercial that ran in California at the time. One day he was in the crowd with his mother where I was doing a personal appearance in costume. His mother brought him up to me and introduced herself telling me what a big fan she and Rodney were of the show and asked if I would mind holding Rodney for a picture. I was more than happy to comply and picked the tyke up and held him on one arm in a sitting position with his little legs draped over my forearm. As I held him, and several cameras were flashing, I asked him to say his famous line, 'Jummo Jack,' from the commercial for me. He did, and then he asked in a very soft, little voice, 'Cap'n Marvel, could you tell me one thing?' 'Sure,' I said, 'what is it, Rodney?' He replied, 'Could you fly me around the block just once?'"

Although many years have passed, an entire generation around the globe grew up loving this colorful incarnation of Captain Marvel. The show gave young children not only plenty of adventure, but had a quaint sense of morality that's seemingly lost in today's children's television programs. *Shazam!* remains a cherished part of childhood to those who grew up in the seventies and early eighties, always waking up early on Saturday morning to see their favorite hero. "We did it with a great deal of passion," said Lou Scheimer, "I mean, I loved what I was doing. [After] I dropped comic books, I went to art school, went into animation, and all of a sudden I was stuck in Hollywood. Unbelievable."

In closing, Bostwick reminisced, "Life goes by in, what seems to me, to be just a flash, but I'm beginning to realize as we all mature and approach the end of our individual races here on Earth that, after all is said and done, what really matters most is if we can leave things just a little bit better than the way we found them, if we can offer just a little something more of ourselves towards the betterment of mankind that could possibly enable a new generation to realize their dreams a little bit more readily than perhaps having to play the cards that they were initially dealt in life, then I think we've done all that can be expected of us with our lives and we can quietly reflect back on our accomplishments with fond memories. That's the satisfaction that I'll forever be able to carry with me right up to the finish line ... that I took this one simple little Saturday morning show to heart and gave it my best. SHAZAM!"

Boston's Captain America

Around 1966, WNAC-TV in Boston aired the *Marvel Super-Heroes* cartoon show hosted by Captain America (actor Arthur Pierce), who performed in live-action skits and adventures. Pierce was also the voice of the animated incarnation of the star-spangled hero for Grantray-Lawrence Animation. What a lot of kids in the New England area didn't know was that Cap's dialogue and adventures were written by the esteemed Jerry Siegel, Superman's co-creator and original writer. For Siegel, the television work was one of his proudest achievements; he got great satisfaction from watching the finished production on the tube.

During personal appearances, TV Host Captain America (Arthur Pierce) provided these promotional handouts to his fans in the New England area.

Ex-Marine Pierce took the role to heart and promoted the show all through the area with personal appearances in schools, department stores and hospitals. An athletic, imposing figure, the actor portrayed the hero with a lot of vigor, enthusiasm and integrity. "I wasn't that familiar with Captain America," Pierce said about the audition. "So I went into the men's room there, I spent about an hour looking in the mirror trying to put the ingredients together for a character as Captain America. And I said, 'Okay.' I went upstairs to audition and they said, 'Oh, God, that's perfect! We want to sign you.'" He was later told that he earned the role after they had auditioned 1,000 other actors.

Throughout Pierce's segments, various actors portrayed other characters from the Marvel Universe, including Dr. Doom and Hulk. One of the most memorable live-action plotlines was Captain America's reunion with his old sidekick. Pierce said, "If you know anything about Captain America and the Second World War, they say he got killed and he went under the water and he was in suspended animation in a block of ice for many, many years during the Second World War, and I thought [Bucky] was gone, I thought he was dead. I thought my partner was dead, my little Bucky Barnes. But I got a call, we got a call about an iceberg, a clear iceberg passed a certain part of the world and they see that Bucky Barnes was in it. So what they did was take the iceberg and they

Superhost (Marty Sullivan) brightened youngster's Saturday mornings in the Cleveland, Ohio region.

Rare screenshots of WNAC-TV's Captain America (Arthur Pierce) in action.

somehow, I don't remember how they did it, but they tried to melt it and tried to bring back Bucky, which they did. So that happens in the Boston Navy Yard that we used as a background there. So we melted the ice and there he was."

At one point, the actor recalled that the producers were thinking of expanding Arthur's hosting duties into the New York tri-state area. Sadly—after two years and the bitter public backlash against the *Batman* television show—the kid-favorite host and his segments were pulled off the air. Pierce looked forward to moving on to other acting opportunities and enjoyed a long acting career over the years.

One thing that didn't end was his friendship with Jerry Siegel. Reminiscing about his pal, Pierce said, "Jerry sent me something about two or three months before he passed away. He said, 'Dear Artie, I just want to say that my heart is bad. The doctors say I really may not last a year. But if I only had the speed of Captain America and the power of Superman, I would be a good, healthy, strong man.' Kind of a laugh. But that's one of the things he wrote in cards. He was very proud of me, and I was very proud of Jerry. I loved Jerry, I loved his daughter Laura, and I love [his wife] Joanne."

TV HERO MOVIE SHOW HOSTS

SUPE'S ON!

Such was the cry that began a weekly Saturday morning show that ran throughout the upper Midwest U.S. area. Originating on Cleveland's WUAB 43, it promised a full three to four hours' worth of comedy shorts and films, all presented by the world's (probably) only red-nosed superhero, Superhost. Mild-mannered TV station director trainee Henry Bookerstein had merely to step into a nearby phone booth and utter the word "Sponsor!" to become his famous alter ego. After a puff of smoke, out came Superhost, who was able to deftly handle any situation that hosting a Saturday morning movie show threw at him.

It all started with Marty Sullivan, a Detroit, Michigan native who found his way to Cleveland via a circuitous route that included training as a draughtsman, a stint in the Navy and a job as a radio reporter in Indiana. It was during this last position that a friend at WGPR radio in Cleveland called and offered Sullivan a reporting job. While it worked out for a while, the friend that hired him moved on and Sullivan figured his days at the station were numbered. He got word about a new TV station in Cleveland, WUAB 43, which was looking for employees, so he went there for an interview.

The managers at WUAB liked him and hired him on the spot in 1963 to be half of the station's voiceover announcing team. In reality, he performed far more tasks than that: everything from running audio and video to relieving the switchboard operator during lunch. But his most visible contribution came in 1969 after a station executive witnessed some of Sullivan's natural antics. Sullivan explained, "They were having The Four Lads in to do a lip sync to their big hit. So they had a set built where The Four Lads would be standing in four different positions. I was floor director at the time with a headset on and they wanted me to stand in the four different places so they could adjust the lighting. So I'm standing in one position, they'd have me move to the next position and tweak the lights. They're doing this, and I'm trying to do other jobs on the headset as well, and the director hollered to me that my fly was open. I must have looked pretty embarrassed trying to cover up and check it out and make sure! *[laughs]* The program manager happened to be in there seeing my embarrassment and after the show was over he came up and asked me to come up with an idea for a character to do as a movie host. And that was the beginning of Supe."

Most other movie show hosts at the time patterned themselves after cowboys, spacemen or monsters, but Sullivan took the less-traveled route of a comedic superhero. "I remember when I was a kid I grew up and the radio was all Superman and Green Hornet and all that kind of stuff,"

Superhost (Marty Sullivan) with Buck Owens and Roy Clark, of the long running variety show, *Hee Haw*.

Sullivan stated, "I grew up with radio heroes. I kind of liked Superman, but I knew I couldn't really carry that off too well. *[laughs]*" While he did decide to loosely base his appearance on Superman, his voice and mannerisms came from another source entirely, "I had worked with an old-time radio guy in Detroit; Ralph Bingay was the man's name," continued Sullivan. "He was a comedian and he did different voices. One of the voices for a character he invented called Sharp Frank, was based on someone he actually knew in his old neighborhood. Frank talks like Supe, 'Hello 'dere! How ya' feelin'?' you know. He was a really funny man. So I figured well, I'll just use Ralph's voice. That was where Supe came from." With his high-pitched voice and freewheeling attitude, Superhost became a hit almost instantly.

The typical fare on his show, which was first titled *Saturday Mad Theater with Superhost*, would be an hour of various comedy shorts followed by a couple of feature length movies. Interspersed between all of this were special bits of madness in the form of comedy skits, monologues and in-studio interviews with the stars of some of his movies...

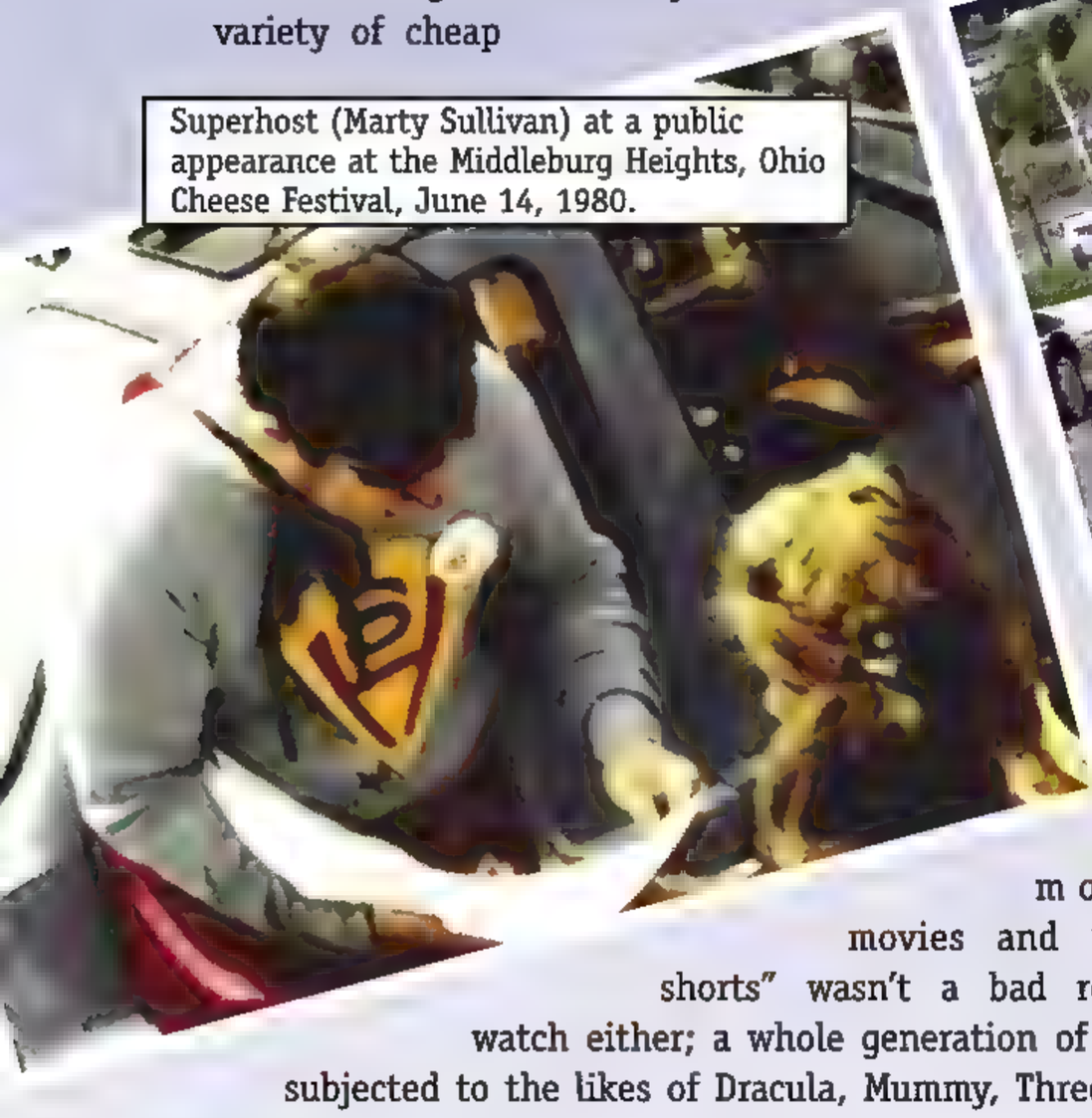
Superhost (Marty Sullivan) in a parade, riding on his signature three-wheeled HMV Freeway automobile.

although the "stars" were other WUAB employees made up to look like characters from the films.

Nothing was safe from Superhost's sights. Influenced by other local shows such as *Ghoulardi*, Supe went after public figures, hit films and TV shows, commercials, the movies he was showing and even himself. It all was fair game and all were lampooned equally, but in a nice way. Sullivan remembered, "When I started the show, I decided I was not going to go for any blue humor, anything like that, because I wanted to keep it family-oriented. *Ghoulardi* was a bit of a departure on that in Cleveland though, Ernie Anderson, because he, *[laughs]* he had no respect for anything. He'd just make fun of anybody that occurred to him. That was a great delight for me, I was in the age group that enjoyed seeing some of the pomposity punctured." His desire to keep the

show family-friendly, coupled with the irreverent influence of *Ghoulardi*, was able to provide Sullivan and his crew targets for years. Many of his popular recurring skits included Superhost's take on *The Bionic Woman*, retitled "Moronic Woman," *Battlestar Galactica*, now called "Battleship Ethnica" and musician Slim Whitman and his TV marketing ads for his albums, who was newly christened as Fat Whitman, of course.

Shot live-on-tape without a studio audience, the wraparound segments for each week's show were usually done in one to two hours. Occasionally, an involved skit or commercial parody took a few more hours spread out over a couple days. Superhost and his antics were clearly the main draw of the show for kids, although the weekly variety of cheap monster movies and "selected shorts" wasn't a bad reason to watch either; a whole generation of kids was subjected to the likes of Dracula, Mummy, Three Stooges and Godzilla films for the first time.



Superhost (Marty Sullivan) at a public appearance at the Middleburg Heights, Ohio Cheese Festival, June 14, 1980.

Marty Sullivan today, Superhost and his new wheels!

If all of his station duties weren't enough, Superhost was a staple of in-person appearances as well. Whether he was wanted at store grand openings, parades or just promotion for WUAB, Sullivan was always kept busy in the area, even though he wasn't always crazy about it. "I did not like public appearances that much. I mean, I'm on every Saturday, what do they want to see me in person for? I was better on the TV than I ever was in person, so I didn't see the reason for it. They paid you well, but... There was a do-it-yourself series of stores in Cleveland and they hired me for a public appearance on a Saturday. In the store they had this little mock-up of a house built where I signed autographs in costume for the kids. I remember I signed for like two hours or so and then the crowd thinned out. I'm standing there waving to people and two youngish guys went by and one saw me, poked his buddy and says, 'Hey there's that guy that's on the TV!' and the other guy looked and says, 'Oh, that asshole.' *[laughs]*! That kind of put the whole thing in perspective for me. You don't have to keep humble, the public will keep you humble *[laughs]*!"

Superhost continued at his weekly post for nearly twenty years, when the landscape of TV began to change and it became cheaper for local stations to buy outside programming than to produce their own. Sullivan's show, which was now called *Superhost*, had been steadily trimmed down from its three-hour Saturday afternoon block, to a final running time of an hour. The features were gone, replaced by a couple comedy shorts and cartoons. Finally, in 1989 one of WUAB's higher-ups decided to end it all. "They kept moving it from noon to one o'clock, then one o'clock to eleven o'clock, then from eleven o'clock to two o'clock," remembered Sullivan. "Every time we'd get a new sales manager in there, he'd have the hots for some other program, the whole bottom line, of course, is the bottom line. They're trying to make as much as they can. It's funny, the guy that ultimately cancelled my show, was ultimately cancelled himself. They kicked him downstairs and I was the first one into his office to tell him I understood how he felt *[laughs]*." Sullivan continued with his announcing job at WUAB until he decided to retire in 1993 to head out West and get into computers. When asked if he and his crew had fun on *Superhost*, Sullivan replied, "We did, yeah. One thing led to another on that show and that's what accounted for a lot of it." With the complete silliness of the skits, the amount physical comedy and inventive way in re-using old jokes—it was like *MAD* magazine brought to life.

Marty Sullivan's *Superhost* program was one of the longest-lasting entries in the field. When he left the air it signaled the end of the widespread era of the costumed movie host had truly come. But his long run was fondly remembered by his fans, and youngsters that grew up with the Saturday *Superhost* tradition will never forget rushing to their TVs when they heard, "Supe's On!"

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chapter 5

WONDER WOMAN

With a rush of animated stars and rollicking musical fanfare, the familiar *Wonder Woman* burst into living rooms across North America in late 1975. The light, adventurous tone of the series pilot, plus the positive attitude and unquestionable beauty of its star, combined to make *Wonder Woman* an instant hit. The show catapulted to the top of ABC's ratings, and audiences couldn't get enough of Diana Prince and her incredible alter ego. Although she may have been someone new to weekly viewers, comic readers had already been enthralled with the character for decades.

Wonder Woman was created by William Moulton Marston as a female answer to the explosion of early major comic heroes like Superman and Batman. She made her debut comic book appearance in late 1941 in an issue of *All Star Comics*, published by All-American Publications. By the middle of the following year, after an additional successful appearance in an issue of *Sensation Comics*, the Amazonian princess was awarded her very own monthly title. The heroine proved to be one of All-American's most popular characters as her early adventures had her taking on the Axis powers to fight for the cause of justice.

Marston saw Wonder Woman as an unconventional, forward-looking character with a definite eye on advancing women's independence and power. The character was used to further the uncommon view at the time that women should be more than mere set dressing or capture bait in stories. His goal was to prove the power of women and their importance to society. Until her initial appearances, there were very few powerful females in comics. Wonder Woman was an important character for her time and has remained so through to the modern day.

Her origins were simple enough. As an Amazonian Princess living on Paradise Island, neither Diana nor her sisters had had previous contact with the outside world. That all changed during World War II when serviceman Steve Trevor crashed his aircraft on her home. Diana helped keep him alive, but his arrival made the goddess Aphrodite recognize the danger that the Axis powers posed.

Because of this, she decided that one of the Amazons should be sent out to protect the world and stop the Nazis' advancement. The choice of who would be sent out was to be determined through a contest of physical feats. Diana's mother, Queen Hippolyta, forbade her daughter Diana from competing, but she defied her mother, disguised herself and competed anyhow. In no surprise, Diana proved herself to be the strongest warrior. When her was identity revealed, the Queen had no choice but to allow her to become Wonder Woman. Diana returned Trevor to the outside world where she then took the role of his nurse, Diana Prince. While many of her characteristic elements like her invisible plane, tiara and ability to fly would be introduced into her comic continuity much later, she always had her bullet-deflecting bracelets, magic lasso and incredible powers of strength.

Since her solo title debut in 1942, Wonder Woman has gone through many changes, but has always remained an integral part of DC Comics' lineup. Yet the path to bring this famous heroine to live-action was an unusually long one. Unlike her contemporaries Batman, Superman, Captain Marvel and Captain America,

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The power of Wonder Woman, the heroine portrayed by Lynda Carter, inspired young women around the world.

For the second season, Wonder Woman's costume was recut to Lynda Carter's instructions and made to appear more modern.

When it came time to fight for the United States, Wonder Woman (Lynda Carter) never backed down from a challenge.

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Wonder Woman never received a theatrical chapter play series, nor a radio show, nor exposure in any of the other popular outlets that many early heroes had. No, her first steps into live-action would come more than a quarter century after her creation, and they would be on the small screen.

Wonder Woman's most famous adaptation was still nearly eight years away when, in 1967, the staff of Greenway Productions first had the idea to bring her to life. The phenomenal success of their *Batman* series in 1966 inspired company head William Dozier to explore bringing similar comic characters to television. Wonder Woman's status as one of DC Comics' most popular ongoing characters, coupled with the fact that she had never been on television, made her a natural follow-up for development. Of course, the instincts of the producers were to duplicate their successful *Batman* pattern and create their version of Wonder Woman as a comedy.

A script was co-written by Stan Hart, Larry Siegel and frequent *Batman* scribe Stanley Ralph Ross. Our brief glimpse of this version of Wonder Woman takes place during a stormy night. Dubbed *Wonder Woman—Who's Afraid of Diana Prince?* (the title being a play on *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, the famous film starring Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton from the year before), it stars Ellie Wood Walker as a mousy-looking, clumsy Diana Prince who appears to be in her twenties, but is actually 27 million years old. She lives in the modern-day suburbs with a mother who is well aware of her superheroine status. But her overly dramatic parent feels that flying around saving the world is no way for her daughter to behave, and she constantly picks on her to settle down with a husband. But Diana only has eyes for Steve Trevor.

After deciding she needs to rescue Steve from the downpour, she quickly ducks behind a secret panel in her bedroom and steps out in full Wonder Woman costume. On top of her problematic home life as Diana Prince, her transformation into Wonder Woman also reveals that the character is delusional and narcissistic. As she fawns over herself in the mirror she sees the reflection of a curvy, attractive woman (accompanied to the musical strains of "Oh, You Beautiful Doll", no less), when in reality she is still a scrawny girl who doesn't even fill out her costume. After blowing a kiss to her optimized reflection—played by actress Linda Harrison—she crawls out the window and dashes off on her adventure to help Steve. This last bit of business was a very odd choice. Had the pilot been picked up it would have been interesting to see if the producers would have kept the idea that Diana saw herself as far more attractive to others than she actually was.

Although it was just a short one-act scene, and unable to fully delve into the history of Wonder Woman, the pilot seemed to completely ignore the comic book origins of the character in order to make Diana Prince like any other young American woman stuck in the suburbs. The project was

envisioned as a comedy, and indications were that it would have been done in the same over-the-top manner as the *Batman* series, even including *Batman*'s narrator, William Dozier. However, even at its short five-minute length, the presentation fell flat. It featured no action and not much about it was very inspiring. As a positive, the Wonder Woman costume worn by Linda Harrison was well done. Aside from a white belt, it was mostly faithful to the comic version with all the accents and elements in place. With a bit of additional tooling, the premise for this pilot may have been salvageable, but as it failed to generate any interest among television networks or buyers, it never got the chance to develop further. Since it was also never screened for the public, *Wonder Woman—Who's Afraid of Diana Prince?* was destined to quickly fade into the realm of mostly-unseen and unknown productions.

Although the first take on Wonder Woman didn't succeed, the character would prove difficult to keep off television. In late 1973, well after Greenway's options had expired, another attempt was made to introduce a flesh-and-blood Wonder Woman to television audiences, this time with Warner Bros. at the helm. The tone of this new pilot was more serious and completely avoided anything having to do with the previous production from Greenway.

Titled simply *Wonder Woman*, the pilot premiered March 12, 1974 and starred Cathy Lee Crosby as Diana, with Ricardo Montalban as the villain, Abner Smith, and Andrew Prine as his chief henchman, George. It was produced by John G. Stephens, and written, developed and executive produced by John D.F. Black. Direction of the pilot was by Vincent McEveety. All of these gentlemen had strong backgrounds in television, all three having worked on the original *Star Trek* as well as many other top series.

Wonder Woman began by showing Diana being sent into the outside world by her mother. Her mission was simply to be present with her love of justice and right, to show the world the true value of women. Diana, whose identity of Wonder Woman was known to seemingly everyone in the film, took a job as a receptionist and part-time spy for an unnamed government agency headed by Steve Trevor in Washington, DC.

The plot centered on a set of stolen books which held the names and information for thirty-nine US spies. They had been stolen by agents of Abner Smith, who then held them for ransom for the sum of fifteen million dollars. It was Wonder Woman's job to retrieve the books within Smith's imposed deadline of forty-eight hours. Diana was able to thwart every attempt to stop her, even including battling one of her sisters from the island, whom Smith had recruited. In the end, Diana was of course successful in stopping Smith and his henchmen, retrieving the books and the ransom money.

Wonder Woman 1974-style, with Cathy Lee Crosby in the first telefilm's title role.

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Wonder Woman (Lynda Carter) in the first season of the series.

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While Cathy Lee Crosby did a credible job as the lead character, the material with which she had to work didn't rise to the level of greatness. The telefilm was disjointed and took massive leaps in logic and continuity. Everyone seemed to know everyone else's moves ahead of time, which allowed the story to be tied up much too neatly and predictably. Viewers never even got to see Wonder Woman in her uniform until forty minutes into the story, and even then, her outfit was a surprising change. The Bill Thomas design included blue tights and boots, a red coverlet with an embroidered gold eagle, white zipper down the front and blue sleeves with a few white stars scattered about. She also wore gold bracelets and a gold belt that held a retractable rope. It was a design that strongly reflected its time, resembling a stylized set of workout or athletic clothing more than Wonder Woman's instantly identifiable costume.

This was essentially Wonder Woman in name only. It was a spy adventure, which reflected a bit of what was going on with the DC comic at the time, but as a telefilm it left fans wanting a lot more—like the actual character. This Wonder Woman was blonde and seemed to have no super-powers or abilities beyond that of a highly trained special agent. She had her bracelets, but never used them to deflect a single bullet, instead it was revealed that they could be used as explosive devices. She referenced her invisible plane, but was never shown using it. She had a rope, but it was not her famed magic lasso. She may have been a wonderful woman but unfortunately for fans, she was not Wonder Woman. It was a shame that the opportunity to present a stronger *Wonder Woman* pilot wasn't taken better advantage of. With the crew and cast behind the film, it could have been a home run. Many of the key production personnel were involved with great series and would go on to later work on some of television's most memorable programming. But this *Wonder Woman* was not destined to be in that group.

Fortunately, this was not to be the final chance for Wonder Woman. The movie-of-the-week pilot scored well enough for ABC to look at giving the property additional life. A new production was decided upon, which also took the form of a telefilm and brought with it a complete change in concept and direction. It was decided to take the character back to her comic book origins and begin anew.

An entirely new crew was hired to develop the production. Douglas Cramer, whose previous years in television saw him work on such varied series as *Star Trek*, *The Monkees* and *The Brady Bunch*, landed the chief spot as producer. Stanley Ralph Ross was once again asked to work on *Wonder Woman*, but this time with a much more faithful version of the character.

The biggest hurdle for the new series was in trying to find someone capable of portraying the heroine and doing so in a believable manner. This was going to be a big role and thousands of young women turned out with hopes of playing the part. One of them was a recent transplant from Arizona named Lynda Carter. Carter explained, "I sort of always knew what I wanted to do. I always knew that I wanted to sing and I wanted to act, and I didn't know how I was going to go about that. I was raised in Arizona, and like a million other girls, trying to figure out how to do that. I started singing in bands at a pretty early age and through high school. After high school I went on the road with a couple of different groups and then decided that wasn't going to get me where I wanted to go." With that in mind, Carter chose another path to continue her career in 1972, she added, "I decided to move to California to study acting. I went into workshops and lived off what I had saved while I was singing and I went out on interviews."

Unknown to many fans was that Lynda Carter auditioned for Wonder Woman for the first telefilm. The role eventually went to Cathy Lee Crosby, but it was fortuitous that she tried out because one of the main producers for the new film saw footage from those original sessions. Carter explained, "When I went in to read, the show's producer, Doug Cramer told me I didn't have to read, they were just going to go ahead and test me. Which was great because I hated reading. Reading is very, very difficult. So I tested and I don't think that the network was very interested in using a complete unknown. They wanted someone with experience. But Doug Cramer kind of went to the mat because he thought I was the perfect one for it, and he said, 'I won't do it then if I can't use this girl.' Which was pretty cool."

The network's reluctance can be understood. Carter was very fresh on the scene and had never portrayed a large part, let alone carried a network series. She explained, "I think I had only done a show called, I think *Nikita* or something like that. Then I had done a part in a television movie. Each of them a day. A day's work was all. Those are the kinds of roles that were available at that time. Either the little cutesy bunny type or they would be someone's mother. There really weren't any parts for women at that time on television. It just was a barren landscape in terms of executive thinking that people wanted to see women on television. They thought it was all cowboys. They had started with sitcoms, so they thought that could work, but they really didn't think a woman could hold an hour show." But after seeing her performance on film, and with Cramer's insistence, the network capitulated and Carter won the prestigious starring role.

Carter was thrilled, since she knew about the character from the comic, "Every girl growing up is familiar with it. Because there really wasn't stuff on television. As a matter of fact there were no women really that young girls could identify with at all. Let alone someone that was pretty and smart and kind, and yet she could do all these great things. It's hard to see in retrospect because of where we live now, but at the time it was pretty groundbreaking."

Almost equally important to the new film would be the role of Steve Trevor, American Air Corpsman, love interest and inspiration for Diana to leave Paradise Island. There were many actors brought in to read for the role, but only one that was seriously considered from the start. Born in Kansas City, Kansas, Lyle Waggoner spent most of his early working life as an entrepreneur and door-to-door salesman. Over time, enough of his friends and business contacts convinced him that his bearing and voice would serve him well as an actor. So with full agreement from his wife, Waggoner headed to Hollywood in 1964 to give it a try.

Waggoner recalled, "I got out here, found an apartment and started looking for a job, and found one as a salesman where they paid me a draw, plus commission. That allowed me to go around and find out what actors did to get in this business. I couldn't get an agent because I didn't have any credits or anything, so I went to class. After a while, I met some of the actors who did have agents and they said, 'Maybe my agent would like to take a look at you,' and one of them did and he liked me and he signed me. He got me an interview at Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer, in their talent program, where they would hire a stable of actors and actresses, put them under contract, pay them like two-hundred fifty bucks a week—which was great—and you were able to study with acting coaches that they had there on the lot." This was a very lucky break in that it came at the tail end of the golden age of the studio system in Hollywood. Not long after this, such studio-sponsored classes and programs were done away with.

A few years into his stay, Waggoner had amassed a series of bit-part credits within MGM productions, including a shot at one role that could have made him a household name even earlier; namely, the part of Batman. Waggoner explained, "I heard about that through my agent, that would have been late '65. He sent me out on that audition and I had a good shot." He

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got to the point of screentesting for the part, which was reserved solely for those who were in serious contention for roles. Waggoner continued, "I was number two. It was between me and Adam [West] and I gotta hand it to Adam. I thought he played that part so well. He was really good and they made a good choice though it didn't go in my favor *[laughs]*! Adam did a great job."

Even though he never got to play Bruce Wayne or Batman, he very soon scored a regular series in 1967 on *The Carol Burnett Show*. He stayed there for eight years before deciding it was time to move on. Waggoner explained, "I was on Burnett for seven-and-a-half, eight years, and I said, 'You know what? Who knows where this is going to go? They've got to pull the plug on this sometime.' A variety show had never been syndicated before and so if they do yank the rug from under this show, then I'm on the street with my hat in my hand."

Fortunately for him, he was soon contacted with an offer of a leading role. "I had a friend of mine who was a writer named Stanley Ralph Ross," Waggonner explained, "He called me and he said, 'They asked me to do this pilot of this show called *The Wonder Woman*, a take off on the comic book. The part of Steve Trevor's perfect for you and I'm going to write it as though I'm writing it for you.' I said, 'All right!' So he did and then they had me come in and audition and sure enough, there's like ten other guys in the room that look just like me... Anyway, I got that part. They wrote it for me, you can't get much easier!"

Waggoner recalled being the first major casting for the series. He was also helpful in assisting the producers with their search for the lead. Waggoner explained, "They had me audition all the girls who were going to play Wonder Woman. I auditioned about five of them, did a little scene with them—I can't remember their names. I did Lynda and I said, 'In my opinion, this girl looks like the cartoon. She's very pretty, she's got a great figure and she was fine in the audition.' I don't know if my recommendation had anything to do with it, but they hired her."

The new telefilm finally went back to the character's roots and portrayed her origins pretty faithfully. Instead of a quick scene showing her homeland as in the first *Wonder Woman* TV movie, this production spent time with Diana, her mother the Queen and her Amazonian sisters on Paradise Island. Diana's first glimpse of the outside world comes when she sees the aftermath of an airplane duel between a Nazi and Steve Trevor. Steve bails out of his plane and is shot by the Nazi as he is parachuting to safety. He ends up unconscious on a beach on Paradise Island where Diana and one of her sisters finds him and carries him back to their civilization for medical treatment.

While there, Diana feels something for Steve since he is the first man she has ever seen in her life. She wishes to follow him back to the outside world even though her mother does not approve of her daughter leaving. Diana is able to win a series of competitions which eventually compel her mother to agree to let her go. She has proven to the Queen that she is more than capable of taking care of herself off the island. Her mission in the regular world is to look after Steve Trevor and to thwart the Nazis' plans to dominate the world. Using a cover as a United States Army soldier and aide to Trevor, she renames herself Diana Prince to keep tabs on the latest movements of the enemy.

The first film's all-star cast of supporting players were primarily known for comedic roles. Cloris Leachman, who had just completed Mel Brooks' classic *Young Frankenstein* feature, played Queen Hippolyta, Diana's mother, as a slightly clueless character. Kenneth Mars, also from *Young Frankenstein*, and Henry Gibson, fresh off his multi-year stint on *Laugh-In*, both played Nazis in a light, inept manner. Finally, longtime standup favorite Red Buttons was a shifty talent scout who eventually tries to betray Diana due to her naiveté in the real world. These guests more than anything pointed to the tone the show was hoping to capture. Scenes with villains were kept somewhat comedic, never venturing into anything too realistic or serious.

Waggoner agreed with the assessment of *Wonder Woman* as a comedy. He explained, "Well, [Stanley Ralph Ross] apparently had a gift for comedy writing, and that's what *Wonder Woman* was supposed to be; a comedy take-off, because it was a cartoon. Just like *Batman* was a comedy take-off with a lot of comic lines. Maybe that's why they took me, because I had had experience in that area of comedy." Even the action sequences and fights were appropriate for family viewing. No one was aiming for a dark, violent *Wonder Woman*.

Lynda Carter decided early on that she would perform Wonder Woman and Diana Prince as straight as possible, while allowing the events of the episodes to unfold around her. Carter explained the choice, "I never played the part as a joke. I never played it tongue-in-cheek. The only way I thought the rest of that could work would be for me to play it absolutely straight. Otherwise, if you think that you're making fun of the character, then very often times when an actor has too much fun on camera, it's not very funny off camera when you see it."

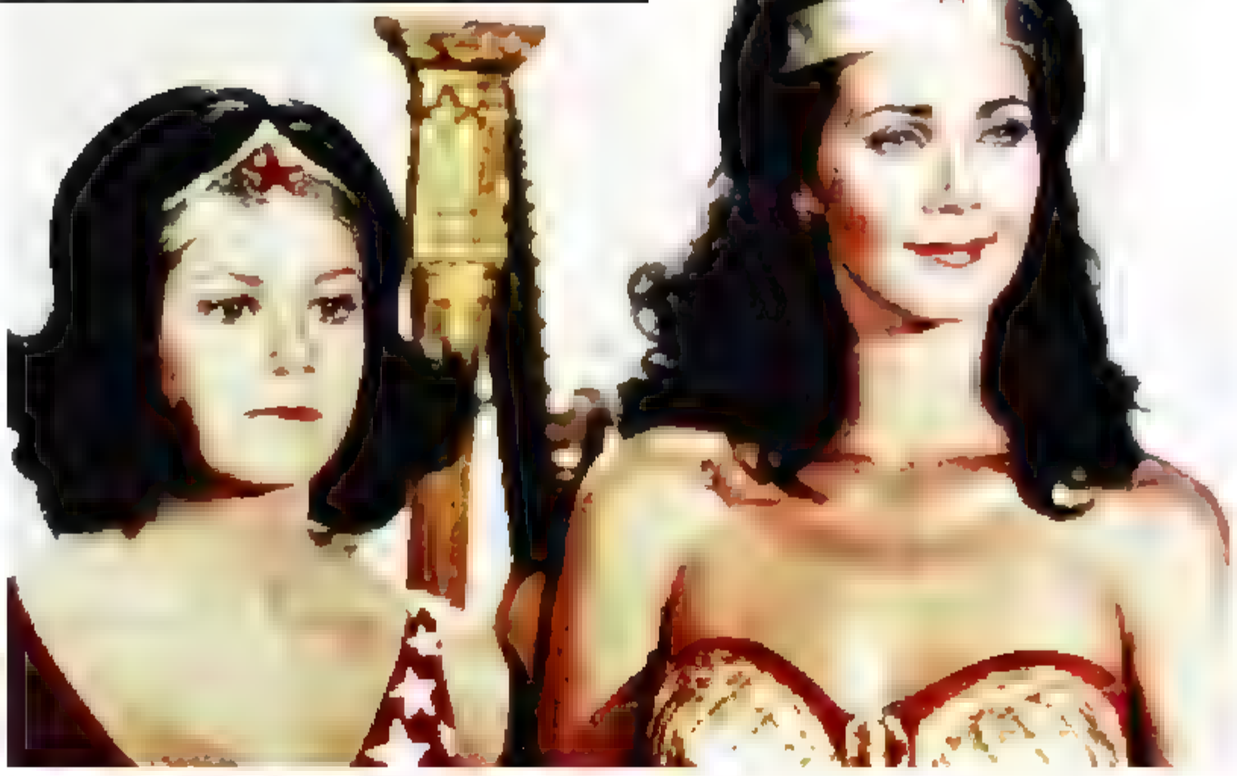
"The other part is that I never played 'Wonder Woman.' I never approached it as Wonder Woman," Carter continued. "I never looked at it as trying to be a superhero, but more that she happened to be a superhero. She was raised with a group of people where everyone could do the same things and it was just unusual in the circumstance. I used the Diana Prince character as my tool to let people get to know who Wonder Woman was, because there wasn't a lot of personal dialogue with Wonder Woman."

As great as the Wonder Woman character was, there was never going to be a lot of growth, or potential for growth, with her. She was who she was, and she was only around when needed. For any real advancement to be shown, it was going to be through her civilian guise. Carter continued, "The character development really had to happen with Diana and how she approached life and work and everything else. I wasn't going to play Diana as a dolt. Superman oftentimes was a dolt and a bumbling kind of guy, and I just didn't see that as part of

anything I wanted to do. They wanted me to be a little bit more predictable, I think. However, that's the only way those things had been played in the past. I was a feminist myself and I just wasn't going to go that route. There were a couple real stinkers in there where they asked me to approach it a little differently and I tried their way and I hated it. So I didn't do it that way anymore." Carter was obviously able to influence how her character was portrayed, especially as the series continued and proved her instincts were correct.

Another crucial element that successfully brought this character to life was her costume. For the first time, Wonder Woman's costume was spot-on with the comic version. Although her boots added a distinctive white stripe to the top edge and front (which would soon be adopted for her comic appearance), the costume was finally faithful to its comic original. The pilot even included the skirt with the costume's first appearance, although Diana took that part off almost immediately. Designer Donfeld was hired to develop the costume, and Lynda Carter was thrilled with it. She remembered, "It was in great hands and Donfeld was wonderful and excellent. I tried things on and if I didn't like it we would change, but that's about it." Everything from her tiara, to her red earrings, to her bracelets, to her magic lasso were present and used from the start. Her bracelets were silver initially and looked like they were made of plastic, but that was probably the only area where the costume was even slightly less than stellar.

Throughout the first season, Wonder Girl was played by future Oscar nominee, actress Debra Winger.



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To simplify her many changes into Wonder Woman, Lynda Carter helped develop the quick and iconic method that came to be used over time. Carter explained, "That was something that they wanted. In the comic books she just disappeared and she came back as Wonder Woman. So there's no phone booth or anything like that. They were going to try to rig something that spun me around and it was really complicated. I was just standing there and I said, 'Why don't I just spin? Why don't I just turn around?' They said 'Hunh? You can do that?' I said, 'Yeah, I've been a dancer, I can do that.' So I did it and they called the executives down, 'Here, look what she can do!' So then they put that in." And so the famous method of Wonder Woman's transformation was born.

Initially she would spin and she would change in stages through a series of dissolves from her civilian clothing into her Wonder Woman outfit. But before long it was simplified even more to the version fans remember: a spin, a quick flash of light along with an exciting thunder sound effect and she was able to shed her Diana Prince guise in a matter of seconds. It was an easy solution and the visual transition immediately became something unique and memorable about the character's television existence.

Finally, every element was in place and there was no doubt that this was Wonder Woman, in look, character and attitude. She was smart, beautiful and honest, her costume was right and she even had her invisible plane. Right from the beginning, the new film hit all the right notes.

When the pilot was broadcast on November 7, 1975, it was an immediate hit. The network was still being cautious though, when it ordered only a couple more episodes to follow up early the next year. When they did air in April, 1976 and pulled in strong numbers, ABC finally went ahead with an order for an additional run of episodes to make up the first season. The balance of what would be known as the "first season" began airing on October 13, 1976, eventually ending its eleven-episode consecutive run on February 16, 1977.

The first batch of *Wonder Woman* episodes co-starred a variety of supporting actors. Guest starring with Lynda Carter and Lyle Waggoner were veteran character actor Richard Eastham as General Blankenship, Steve Trevor's superior, and another seventies television guest-star mainstay, Beatrice Colen as Etta Candy, an assistant to Steve and Diana. With Cloris Leachman unable to reprise her role as Diana's mother from the pilot film, Carolyn Jones—well known as Morticia from *The Addams Family* TV series—stepped in when needed during the first season. One of the most famous discoveries for *Wonder Woman* was a young Debra Winger in her first credited role. She appeared as Drusilla, another Amazon from Paradise Island, who came to Washington with a message for Diana, but decided to stay. Winger appeared as Wonder Girl in three episodes of the first season, including the season finale, and then disappeared from the series.

Lynda Carter initially liked the time setting for the series. She explained, "Well, the one thing I loved about the period part was that it was a very feminist approach with 'women do it this way,' and lines like that. You know how scared networks and

Despite Wonder Woman's popularity, ABC was reluctant to renew the show for a second season, prompting Warner to find a new home for her on CBS.

things can get, even though it was tongue-in-cheek a little bit, they were afraid of offending people, so they made us take a lot of that out."

Anxious young viewers were finally able to see this colorful, energetic and beautiful heroine every single week. The immediately catchy theme song was even accompanied by comic panel versions of Wonder Woman characters that transformed into their real life counterparts right on the screen. Even though its schedule was haphazard in the beginning and it was a show set in the forties, Wonder Woman found a sizeable audience. ABC had scored a hit and had they been more willing to back it, the series would have likely been able to remain on their schedule for years afterward.

Following the end of the first season, the cast and crew of *Wonder Woman* were waiting to hear the fate of their show. ABC was

strangely indifferent and dragged their heels when it came time to order new episodes—a move which frustrated the show's producers. What should have been an automatic renewal was met with a reluctance from the network. Left with no clear sign as to whether ABC would commit to another run of episodes before the beginning of the next season or not, Warner Brothers opted to shop *Wonder Woman* around to the other two major networks. With its winning numbers, CBS was eager to offer *Wonder Woman* a complete season. Their only stipulation was that they wanted to have the series take place in modern times. The feeling was that the World War II plot had played its course and there would be more opportunities for interesting stories to be told in the modern day.

Along with a new network and time era, CBS also brought in a couple of new faces to the production, including executive producer Bruce Lansbury. Lansbury had had recent success as the producer of both *The Wild, Wild West* and *Mission: Impossible*, and would go on after his time at *Wonder Woman* to produce *Buck Rogers*, *Knight Rider* and *Murder, She Wrote*. Lansbury recalled his introduction to *Wonder Woman*, "Doug Cramer brought us together. I knew Cramer over at Paramount, where he was part of the management, and at the time I was doing a show for him for about three years. When I left that situation, he introduced me to the principals of *Wonder Woman*. They wanted a new flavor to it and that's where I came in. I had a reputation for doing lots of wild stuff, and what I'd written previously was rather different. That's the reason Doug brought me on."

Also new to the staff was Toledo, Ohio native Anne Collins. She described her introduction to the series: "*Wonder Woman* was so much my first experience. I was in my twenties, working in Denver, and managed to sell a script to *Hawaii 5-0*. The story editor there helped me get an agent. This agent called me and said, 'They need a story editor at *Wonder Woman*.' This was I think in 1976, or I guess it would have been '77. He said they wanted to get a female story editor for *Wonder Woman* and there were very, very few women writing action-type stuff, and that's what I preferred to do. They just knew they needed a woman and they knew I could write cop shows, adventure stuff, action stuff. And that's really what *Wonder Woman* was." Plus she was familiar with the character. Collins continued, "I read comics as a kid. I had two older brothers, so I was well-versed in Superman and Wonder Woman, Aquaman and Batman and all those comic book characters. I packed up my Volkswagen and moved out [to Los Angeles] with every intention of coming back to Denver after six weeks, because I'd never been a story editor before. I had no idea whether I could do the job or not. I got out there and discovered that I could do the job, but there were a lot of bad writers in Hollywood *[laughs]*! My writing was just as good, or just as bad as anyone else's, so I ended up staying out there. That's basically how I got my start."

To this day, thirty years later, Wonder Woman is very much still a wonder! Her influence on popular culture hasn't waned since she was last seen on television.

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Lynda Carter recalled looking forward the time period change: "I liked it. It gave me and the storylines a lot more flexibility. It didn't just have to be about the war. It could be about a bank robbery or espionage or outer space or it could be anything. So I think there was a lot more flexibility in updating it." Lansbury agreed, "*The Wild, Wild West* was a Western with a twist on it, sort of contemporary ideas put into the West, and it worked like gangbusters. So we took license with *Wonder Woman* in the same way, and it seemed to pay off. We made it more contemporary and spacier."

Collins went on to explain more about the new direction the series was taking, "By the time I got there they had moved *Wonder Woman* into modern day. I was not involved with the World War II background. I think they found that it was too campy and too much of a joke. They wanted to do some real action-type story that had a sense of humor. Bruce Lansbury produced *The Wild, Wild West* and I think Doug Cramer wanted to get that kind of feel into *Wonder Woman*. That kind of tongue-in-cheek without going totally overboard. At the time that was the kind of attitude that you wanted to get in your television shows. You wanted them to be humorous and kind of light, kind of fun but also action, a lot of movement. I mean, you did have a colorful figure in *Wonder Woman*, so you wanted to show her off. I knew who Wonder Woman was and I knew they were moving kind of modern day and they were putting her in a quasi-government agency. So I didn't feel compelled at all to watch the old episodes."

Although Lyle Waggoner was less enthusiastic about the change and regarded the angle of playing his own son "silly," he was happy to rejoin the cast for the next season. Waggoner continued, "They bumped it up to present time and wanted to make (*Wonder Woman*) like a *Police Woman* or dramatic... I never thought that worked, but whatever. They just continued on with the 'present day' thing, which I thought was kind of stupid, but that's what it was."

There was never any thought of replacing the Trevor character with anyone different, Lansbury explained, "No, because he was essential to the series, so we used him in most shows, as I recall. It was a funny character, because he seemed to be so naïve, more naïve than Wonder Woman. The Steve Trevor character was interesting, because you wondered if he knew what the heck was going on sometimes *[laughs]*. We were inclined to make fun of him." Waggoner agreed, citing the character's inability to recognize Diana Prince as Wonder Woman, "You know, she'd put on her glasses and I'd say, 'Oh, excuse me, have we met? *[laughs]* This is an amazing job you did there camouflaging yourself with those glasses! I'd never recognize you!' I mean, boy oh boy... Hard to believe. She looked beautiful with glasses and hair up anyway."

The return of Wonder Woman came on CBS on September 16, 1977 with a new series title, *The New Adventures of Wonder Woman*. She was brought into the modern day with no problems at all. With the Axis threats gone, Wonder Woman returned to Paradise Island, no longer to have any influence on the outside world—or so she thought. When word reached her that the son of Steve Trevor was in trouble, she decided to reappear to the modern world to help him. Some thirty years after her initial appearance, Wonder Woman was back to fight for justice again—this time at the side of Steve Trevor, Jr.

Aside from one episode delving back into Wonder Woman's past, this new series was firmly fixed in the modern day. Now Diana was back working at the IADC (Inter-Agency Defense Command), a futuristic organization set up to thwart criminals from around the world. Much in the vein of *Charlie's Angels*, Steve and Diana would get called in to a room and shown what their next mission would be by an unknown boss over a speaker on a desk. Adventures were solved with the help of IRAC, the IADC main computer, which Diana had secretly hacked to respond to her questions.

The second season sped along, with the Princess destroying the plans of evildoers at every turn. With such energetic roles, the actors were required to do a bit of their own stuntwork and perform with items they were not familiar with. Lynda Carter explained, "I did as much as I could! As much as they'd let me get away with. I got to do almost all the fights. I did a lot of the running in the beginning, but afterwards I let the stuntpeople do it."

The main stuntwoman for *Wonder Woman* was Jeannie Epper. She had been involved in stuntwork from her early childhood, with her first job coming at around age nine on the TV series *The Dakotas*. As one of the premiere stuntwomen in the industry, she has hundreds of credits and has been involved in many of the biggest productions in Hollywood history. A couple years before the regular series, Epper even doubled for Cathy Lee Crosby in the initial 1974 *Wonder Woman* telefilm. She recalled how she got the job for the regular series, "I originally went out on an interview. They brought in everybody that was my height and sort of build. Made us come in bathing suits to look at our bodies, and I had the perfect body for

Wonder Girl, otherwise known as Drusilla (Debra Winger), was Wonder Woman's younger sister from Paradise Island.

her, but I didn't have the face, so they originally went with another lady who looked just like her. About the third episode, I heard that she couldn't move as well as they had hoped for. So I got called in and asked if I could come in for a day and re-interview. I had to drive way down on the set and I watched Lynda work. I watched how she ran and I watched everything. Lynda didn't run like everybody else. She didn't run like a superhero. I did a lot of *Bionic Woman* stuff and [Lindsay Wagner] ran like an athlete. Lynda ran kind of cute and girly. So they decided to give me a shot at it and they called me in for the next day and dressed me up and I had to slide a car in, get out and run behind a tree and spin into the Wonder Woman costume. They couldn't tell the difference because I knew her actions to a 'T'. I just said, 'You know what? She doesn't have to be me, I have to be her.' I did it and I got the job."

Carter described one incident from early in the second season where she took the lead on a stunt that nearly cost her plenty. "I did some things I shouldn't have done and I sort of got in trouble. The biggest one was probably hanging from a helicopter. We couldn't get the shot, the sun was going down, we were in a canyon and the camera couldn't pull itself far enough away... We were changing locations and we were going to lose the shot entirely. We had minutes to try to move the camera, which was never going to happen. So I raced in there myself." Carter ended up hanging unsupported from the underside of a helicopter that lifted off from the canyon. She continues, "I got in trouuuubbbbllleeee. 'Are you out of your mind?' [But] we got the shot *[laughs]*!"

Epper also recalled the incident, "They wanted to sneak one little shot of her and we all felt like little kids that were in trouble. Like *[whispering]* 'Let's go for it, c'mon!' We did a few things with her like that because she was so willing. The production company, oh my gosh, they were like, 'Don't let her do anything!' I think everybody, even the stunt coordinator's dream is to get the actor or the actress to do as much as you can get out of them, without pushing it to the limit and getting them hurt." Not that that stopped Lynda from still doing everything she could. Epper continued, "I remember one time they were trying to find a stuntgirl who would be exactly the same size as the two of us to be the alien Wonder Woman and have me fight her [She is remembering events from the third season episode, "Stolen Faces"]. They couldn't, so Lynda and I had to do the fight together. She was amazing. She's very bright and she trusted me. Of course, I trusted her. I always felt like I had a little more at

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Brian Bolland, the definitive *Wonder Woman* cover artist of the nineties, rendered this classic image for *Wonder Woman* #0 from 1994.

stake in that value to protect her at all costs. I couldn't hit her in the face, but nothing ever went wrong when we did those little fights. Lynda and I would kind of square off and go for it, and we both moved well. Those were fun times."

Lynda Carter added, "I actually ended up being an honorary member of Stunts Unlimited. The stunts were the most fun of all to do, and since then I really have not had an opportunity to do many stunts. There was no stuntwomen's association. They used to have mostly [men]; there were no stuntwomen basically. Jeannie Epper was really the first. The Epper family is a big stuntperson family and Jeannie did all of my stuntwork, and then they had, because she didn't do high falls, they had a couple of times, a guy doing a thing called a Roman Chair, which kind of launches you, it's like a pendulum that launches you far. They had a guy in the costume, but I think in the past it was all men that doubled women, they put wigs on. That's changed, women double women now."

Even as the lead double for *Wonder Woman*, Epper was grounded enough to know when she could or could not perform a stunt. "I was her basic stunt double. For anything I could do, I was given that job." Epper explained, "Fighting, running, jumping—anything very physical. But I knew that there were things that I was not qualified for and I think that's why they kept me around. Debbie Evans did all the motorcycle work, 'cause I don't ride a motorcycle like Wonder Woman. Beth Nufer, is an amazing jumper, they were doing teeterboard stuff that I probably wouldn't have been very good at. I did all the horseback riding, I did most of the jumps. If they go over a certain height, I didn't do them. We would bring in either Sandy Gross or Kitty O'Neil, if they got too out of control height-wise. That's how you get hurt, and I have no problems saying no. I attribute that to my father's great teaching of knowing your own limits. That's how I've kept safe through my life. People will try to bully or get you to do something you really shouldn't be doing. I look back now as an older woman, I think they really appreciated the fact that I wasn't being greedy and trying to hog everything. I would have just hurt myself anyway, and they had a better series because of it. You just can't be a bitch. It doesn't work. It doesn't work in any area."

Lyle Waggoner didn't do many of his own stunts, but he remembered some of his experiences with the crew. "I was always very athletically inclined, so I could do physical things and stunts... I didn't do my own stunts, I mean. Those guys are nuts... incredibly talented nuts. But boy they take risks. I really didn't have to learn any talents. There was a lot of running and jumping and simulating fist-fights. But that's not out of the ordinary for television; it's out of the ordinary for daily life, but not for television. They planted a few squibs on me and they'd explode them like I'd got shot. Which scared the hell out of me the first time one of them went off! Boy those were loud."

Lynda Carter had first-hand experience with squibs as well—literally. In scenes where she would use her bracelets to deflect bullets, small explosive charges were set within them and she had a small control device held in her hands to pop the charges off one by one. But they were a bit awkward to deal with. She explained, "That's why it looked the way it did in terms of where my hands are. You couldn't flick your wrist and do it, you had to do it in a way that was a little stiff. You didn't want to see what was in your hand." Setting the charges off would create a spark effect live during filming, it was a simple, time-saving technique that eliminated the need for later costly effects or post-production optical shots.

A number of changes were made to the Wonder Woman costume for the second season. "I think it was a big improvement when they updated the costume—it was kind of boxy before because it was period." Carter explained, "They were able to cut up on the thighs, and I just happen to have a small waist, and that's just the way it is. Someone's waist size is dependent on how their ribs are shaped. If you've got a rounder ribcage you're not going to have as small a waist. I actually asked them to pull it out. I thought it was too thin so I made them let it out a little bit." The more sleek design of the costume, along with the updated eagle emblem and the addition of striking gold-colored metal bracelets, merely added to the overall appeal. If it was possible, she looked even more like Wonder Woman than before.

As one of the only other people to spend a lot of time in the outfit, Jeannie Epper had a unique feel for what it was like—and how it behaved and changed. She recalled, "It started out in the forties look with the baggy pants, and as it got more modern they kept cutting it up higher and higher and Lynda and I are saying, 'Hey!' But you know, that's what sold—the red, white and blue, and the beauty of being an American hero."

The rough and tumble nature of the program was a concern, given the small outfit that the lead character wore. "I fought, wrestled and did a lot with other stuntwomen. I did all that stuff. Once without my costume!" Jeannie Epper continued, "It fell off and I didn't know whether to put my costume back on or complete the stunt. It was one of those 'do I die, or do I get embarrassed?' [moments]. We worked that issue out though, we figured out how to keep my costume on. Nobody thought about it, you know? This one-piece thing that had stays in it that ran up the front of you to hold it. So when you throw your arms and you hit a minitramp and you jump up in the air, sometimes that thing would just open up. I got to test that and we had to fix it. Since Lynda and I were the ones that had the big boobs, ours were always falling off, so we fixed that so they didn't do that anymore."

There was also no margin for error since the costume offered no way to add any safety padding or additional protection. But it wasn't a concern for Epper, she explained, "I was so excited about having the series and doing that show. I wish I could have that wonderful young feeling again of, 'Oh my God, I can hardly wait to get that costume on and jump over a car!' I don't think it ever bothered me, even when I had to ride horses in those spandex nylons. The mind can overcome a lot. It's amazing how much we can make ourselves do if we desire it enough. I knew going in what was expected and what the

costume was like, so I didn't whine and bawl. I was too thrilled to have that show. I didn't get skinned up and hurt too much. She was the hero, she was the one flinging the guys all over the place. All the stunt coordinators were extremely understanding of the jeopardy that we could get put in in that costume and those high heels."

Waggoner, Carter and Epper remembered that the lengthy production times were probably the toughest part of their jobs early on. Waggoner said, "The hours were a little stiff, which may be a dislike." Carter agreed, "I think just the hours. Towards the end we changed the hours around so that I got home at a decent time. You don't have much of a life outside of the work that you're doing when you're doing a series like that. It started off, I think they were ten-day episodes. But once they got everything under control to get costs down, they lightened up on things. Once you get the routine down, you've done it enough times, the switch into Wonder Woman, etc., etc. Then they went to nine, eight and seven days. So it was a week-and-a-half." Jeannie Epper concludes, "The hours were horrendous. Lynda was twenty-two I think when it started out; I was ten years older. I was still young enough that it didn't bother me very much, but it gets wearing after a while. You get home, you've got to get all that body make-up off, so that you can try to get a few hours' sleep so you can get back on the set and get it all put back on you."

During the first season, there was a little romantic charge between Steve Trevor and Wonder Woman, a bit of banter and such, Trevor was Diana's inspiration to leave Paradise Island after all. But by the second and third seasons, that wasn't much of a factor any longer. Waggoner remembered, "Yeah, I think once they got out of the cartoon part of it, and got into the more dramatic, yeah, it did get lost. Like I said, she wanted to be "Police Woman," and the romantic thing, the relationship between Steve Trevor and Wonder Woman was kind of mellowed out." But with less interaction between the two, Waggoner's on-screen time diminished as the series drew near its end. Waggoner added, "That's true. I didn't really care. I got the same paycheck and a lot of free time, *[laughs]* but my tennis really improved!"

Not only was there a lack of romantic interest between Steve and Wonder Woman, there was never any serious consideration for her or Diana to ever develop that kind of relationship with anyone. Anne Collins confirmed that was true during her time working on the show, "No, where do you go with that? Yeah, there were storylines where she'd be attracted to some guy, and the guy would be attracted to her, but obviously because she was Wonder Woman—like Superman—it just wouldn't work out. We just knew that that wouldn't work because there wasn't enough depth there to really make a relationship believable. Besides, we were an eight o'clock, Friday night show, so that wasn't our audience. It's not like we were on ten o'clock, Monday night where you can get into adult stuff or really get into relationships. That wasn't our show at all."

Lansbury agreed, "It was a family show across the board. All sizes and shapes. The humor came across, and CBS people felt that it was a very good family show. Demographically, we were doing the right thing. I just heard from people that it was a great family show. The kids were treated straight up with the story and with the characters." The focus for *Wonder Woman* was never just on children. To secure the strongest show possible, they tried to attract as many different viewers as they could, from as many different backgrounds and age groups.

An interesting point to the series, and one that certainly had the potential to attract female viewership to a comic program, was that *Wonder Woman* represented a role-reversal of the traditional strong male, weaker female relationship. Both lead actors had their own take on that aspect of the series; Lynda Carter considered, "I think that was kind of the point of it all. I don't really think it's a role-reversal. I think we rescue men all the time anyway, as men rescue us. I think it's a balance of the way that we rescue. Yeah, there's the physical part, but generally speaking it is just trying to get something accomplished. It's not to make a statement, it's part of what needs to be done; it's not to bellow in the wind. It isn't for self-aggrandizement, it wasn't for showing off or anything like that, or trying to prove that women are better or anything like that. It was simply filling a function, I think, for *Wonder Woman*. She was just going about her business and doing what needed to be done, and I don't think her ego was involved at all."

"Well I thought that was hysterical! I mean, I was Lois Lane, she was Superman, and I couldn't do anything right!" said Lyle Waggoner, reflecting what he saw as the humor of the traditional role change. He continued, "I'd have a gun trained on somebody and I'd say, 'All right, stay where you are!', they'd reach down, knock the gun out of my hand and come knock me out, and she'd come and save me. That was the comedy; I don't know if anybody saw the humor in it, but I did!"

Wonder Woman wore this different costume in the first season episode, "The Bushwhackers," that featured cowboy star Roy Rogers.

Lynda Carter's grace and strength added greatly to the public appeal of Wonder Woman.

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As with most live-action superhero programs, there was a distinct lack of familiar villains from the comic incarnation. In all of *Wonder Woman*'s episodes, only two of her comic nemeses appeared—both very early in the first season—namely Baroness Von Gunther in the second episode, and Fausta in the third episode. As usual, this was a production-cost concern. The ability to use generic villains week-to-week helped to keep costs down. Concocting or adapting costumed super-villains, with the amazing powers they were likely to have come with, would have been too cost prohibitive.

According to Lynda Carter, she never knew of any plans to cross over other DC characters on the series. Aside from Wonder Girl, there was no mention of any of the rest of the heroes from the DC universe of characters. For the rest of the run of *Wonder Woman*, her allies and villains were strictly created for the series.

But while things were going full-swing during production of the series' third season, a sudden and unexpected announcement made sure that everyone would have a lot of time on their hands soon. The third season would prove to be *Wonder Woman*'s last. CBS' reasoning for their wholesale dumping of all comic-based shows was essentially done in response to an offhand remark that made the president of the network uncomfortable. He was being teased by friends that CBS was becoming the "comic book" network, and that's all it took to end any future *Wonder Woman*, *Spider-Man* or *Captain America* may have had. Certainly, *Wonder Woman*'s ratings shouldn't have been a factor in the series' cancellation. NTI numbers for April, 1978 (reflecting the series' popularity at the tail-end of its second season) show that *Wonder Woman* had a rating of 15.7 and a share of 32. It was pulling in 44/100 women viewers per household aged 18-49 and an incredible 65/100 for children—which meant it was being watched by more children per household than *Happy Days*, *Laverne & Shirley* and Disney programming. With numbers like that, *Wonder Woman* was the solid number three show at CBS. Interestingly, *Spider-Man* was number one, along with *The Incredible Hulk* at number two. Yet *Wonder Woman* was still pulled from the schedule along with development of any other comic-based projects. Only *The Hulk* continued its run through 1982.

Had there been a fourth season of *Wonder Woman*, everyone was set to return. Waggoner said, "Probably. When you're an actor and you don't have a lot of money, and somebody says, 'If you come here, we'll pay you a lot of money,' I can't see saying no." It would have been interesting to see if Waggoner's part would have been there for him, though. In the season three finale, Diana Prince got transferred from Washington, DC, to the Los Angeles branch of the IADC. No indication was made if Steve Trevor, Jr. was going to get the same transfer or not.

The action by CBS took the actors and crew of *Wonder Woman* by surprise. Carter remembered how she got word while the third season was nearing the end of its production run. "I really had no clue. I had *no* idea. It was such a big shock. There was no one that came down. I think I heard it on the set from someone, 'The show got cancelled.' And I said, 'Hunh?' That's very often the way it happens, that they don't think about making an announcement to the crew or anything like that and it's never done very nicely. It's not their lives every day. These are decisions that executives make and they don't think about the disruption. As in any company, they're not thinking about all the way down the line what it means."

Collins, who had more of an inside track on the show's performance, was more aware of the series' fate. "I can't remember when it was cancelled, but I don't recall it being a big surprise. It was always iffy." She continued, "I'm sure we were working. But we always had an inkling that that was on. You never walked in and went, 'Gasp! Oh my gosh, we're cancelled!' For weeks ahead of time—we were never that strong, as I recall—it was always iffy. We'd get those ratings on Monday and pore over them. And this was I think faulty logic, but we'd say, "Oh, we shouldn't do a show like that any more, the ratings were less than they were, or maybe people didn't like the subject matter. But you get the point where you can't worry. It's out of your hands. What can you do?" Not helping things was the fact that *Wonder Woman* was getting bounced around the schedule towards the end of its run. Normally a desperation move for a network to find a new audience, but its usual effect is to confuse the established audience into not knowing when the next new episode would air.

Wonder Woman's third season began at the start of the new television season in late September 1978 and so bad was its schedule shuffling that it didn't complete its run until almost an entire year later. Episodes ran fairly regularly through March 1979, but the final few were only aired when CBS needed to plug holes in their schedule. It took from May 28 all the way to September 11, 1979 to finally screen the last batch of five episodes. It was so late that viewers could have been mistaken that *Wonder Woman* was going to enter a fourth season. But that was not to be. Production had ceased months earlier and the staff and cast were already on to other projects, never to return. It was an unfortunate, drawn-out conclusion to one of the most successful comic-to-television adaptations. If nothing else, at least the management at CBS had the decency to definitively pull the plug. Although a surprise, the crew of the show knew their fates and that they'd have to be looking for work. They didn't leave the option to pick up the show open-ended like ABC had done. Once CBS let it go, it was over.

Despite the way the series ended, both leads enjoyed their time on *Wonder Woman* immensely. Carter added, "Oh, I loved it! It was in many ways some of the best times in my life. My refuge was the set, I loved that. I loved the crew and I loved the cast. It was a great experience and much easier than it is trying to do it again. It's a lot harder to get another series on the air when you get your first one." Waggoner said, "It was really amazing, and it continues on today. I still get recognized on the street... and I don't look exactly like I did then *[laughs]*! Everybody has great things to say and throughout my entire career, fans and people who recognize me are always very polite,

complimentary and it was just a very pleasant experience having that reputation, that recognition."

Sharing the feelings of the lead actors, Anne Collins was similarly thrilled to have worked on such an iconic series. "It was great. I can't tell you how fun it was. I was happy to be working. I was in my twenties, I was having a great time! A twenty-year old from Toledo, Ohio on the Warner Brothers lot—just incredibly fun!" Stuntwoman Jeannie Epper had nothing but positives to say as well, "It was a wonderful experience. Probably one of the best experiences of my life. I had a wonderful rapport with Lynda. We were good with each other, and the whole crew was good. Everybody just got along really well, and we were all venturing into new territory with all of the superhero stuff then. A lot of it was trial and error, I look back at it and some of it looks antiquated now, but everybody thought it was great then. I had a wonderful time there, if I could; I'd do it all over again."

Adding to the enjoyment that Carter and Waggoner had on the series was getting to work with some of the biggest names of the day. The series included many varied guest stars, from Robert Reed, Robert Hays and Dick Van Patten all the way up to cowboy legend Roy Rogers. Carter recalls working with some of them, "In that first period stuff there were a lot of great actors that did guest shots. It was a lot of fun for all these actors to play bad guys and Nazis tongue-in-cheek. Two people I really liked were Red Buttons and Jessica Walters. But then there was Kenneth Mars, and there were some great comedians. You know, there are just some really great people." Lyle Waggoner also remembered some fun times working with their guests, "Oh, what a treat that was! Man what a roster of guest stars we had! They were just amazing and wonderful to watch work. They had a knack for comedy. Even Roy Rogers was on there. That was amazing to me! Some of the big football players and other fine actors that I had seen on television for years were on there. Robert Loggia, that's where I met him first. I got to know him pretty well after that. He was terrific. Martin Mull was in there... They did a good job."

Both Lynda Carter and Lyle Waggoner were nothing but complimentary and positive about their feelings for one another. About Lynda, Waggoner said, "It's hard to shake the Wonder Woman image; she'll always be known as that. I mean she's Wonder Woman. She looks the part, and she could read a line. I thought she did a fine job!" About Lyle Waggoner, Lynda Carter said, "I loved working with Lyle. Lyle is an absolute sweetheart."

Since her mid-seventies reign, Wonder Woman hasn't been seen in any live-action television productions in any significant way. Rumors of a Wonder Woman solo feature production have been mentioned for years, but little movement has been made. However, Carter had these words of advice about the next Wonder Woman, "I think it should not be a person with any celebrity baggage. I think it should be an unknown. She doesn't have to be inexperienced, but she should be unknown. That's what I think anyway!"

You can almost see her flashing that episode-ending winning smile as Lynda Carter concluded her thoughts about Wonder Woman, "I loved her too! I did, and I often say when people say 'Wonder Woman!' I say. 'Yep, the goddess within!' It really is a thing that's within us all, and I think that's why she struck a chord with so many people."

Part of Wonder Woman's costume upgrades for seasons two and three were high quality metal bracelets.

An international poster touts the theatrical release of Spider-Man's TV pilot episode.

Columbia Pictures Presents A Charles Fries/Dan Goodman Production of SPIDER-MAN
Starring Nicholas Hammond • David White • Michael Pataki • Executive Producers Charles Fries and Daniel R. Goodman
Written by Alvin Boretz • Produced by Edward J. Montagne • Directed by E W Swackhamer • Music by Johnnie Spence

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chapter 6

SPIDER-MAN

Face front, dear readers! There's no one quite like Peter Parker, the meek teenager who was bitten by a radioactive spider and gained the proportionate might and agility of an arachnid. The death of his beloved Uncle Ben—a murder he could have prevented—compels a heroic sense of purpose within the lad, who will never forget that "in this world, with great power there must also come—great responsibility."

Famed Spider-Man artist John Romita hard at work at his drawing table.

Co-creator, Stan Lee drew on personal experiences to create the comic version of Spider-Man, a youngster with his share of real life troubles.

Spider-Man, the definitive Marvel character, was created by the company's legendary wordsmith Stan Lee along with the incomparable illustrator Steve Ditko. Both men infused the character with many of their own characteristics. While Peter inherited some of Ditko's quirky neuroticism, Lee instilled bits of his trademark optimism and snappy banter into their wall-crawling alter ego. The Parker character was grounded in real-world worries with his love life, school grades, finances, and the well-being of his doting Aunt May. Even as Spider-Man, he couldn't escape problems as he was hounded by a ruthless rogues' gallery, the authorities and the wrath of J. Jonah Jameson's biting *Daily Bugle* editorials. It's this grounding in reality that made this guilt-ridden superhero so endearing to the public.

Since his debut in 1962's *Amazing Fantasy* #15, the public has warmly embraced the character throughout the world. His instant universality quickly earned him his very own comic series—*The Amazing Spider-Man* in 1963—one that continues to remain a monthly fixture on magazine stands today. By 1966, Steve Ditko left the title, which ushered in the dynamic debut of "Jazzy" John Romita as the principal artist. The draftsman's crisp storytelling and elegant figure work took the book's popularity to uncharted higher ground. Romita's interpretation of the character would become the company's standard, establishing Spider-Man's slick iconic look for decades to come in everything from comics to merchandising to numerous animated shows on major networks.

Although Spider-Man's first television appearance in 1967 was in animated form, it was soon followed up by an even more striking live-action counterpart. Produced by The Children's Television Workshop, *The Electric Company* was already a much-heralded children's educational series on Public Broadcasting Service affiliates in America when it decided to debut a new segment entitled *Spidey Super Stories* into their hip sketch comedy format in 1974. While children learned fundamental vocabulary skills with live-action Spider-Man, he also entertained them with a jovial attitude, and he quickly became the most popular bit in the show. The Children's Television Workshop was provided the character without a licensing fee, a move that paid off in strides for both them and Marvel. The show would help to acquaint Spider-Man with an even younger national demographic, an audience who would never forget the character.

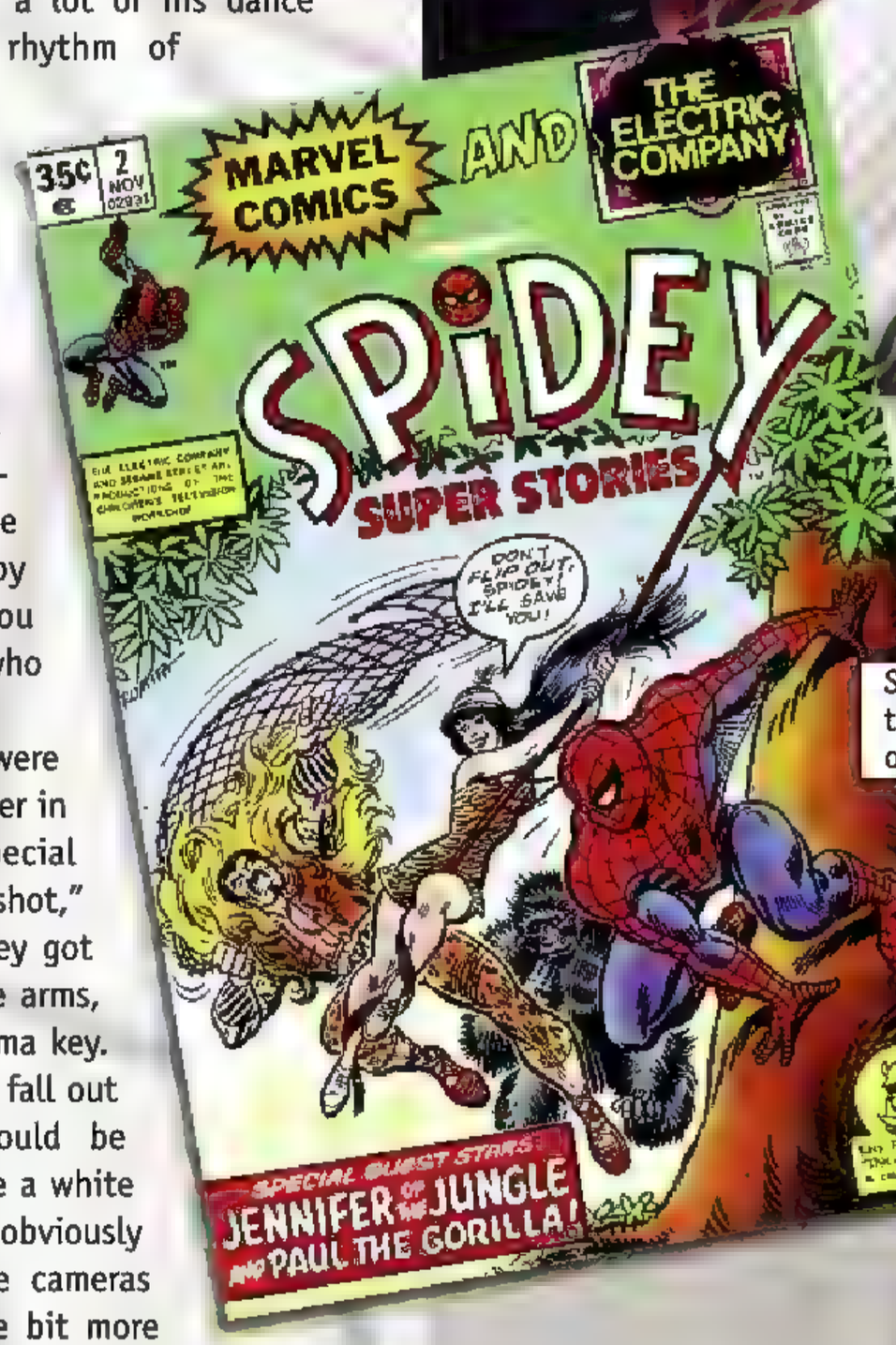
The producers of the show started looking for an actor who could articulate the character through gestures and body movements—since Spidey would not speak—but rather communicate with viewers through on-screen thought balloons. Upon auditioning Danny Seagren, they immediately knew that that they had found their Spider-Man. "There's a guy named Andy Ferguson, who was a producer," Danny recalled, "I went in there and they gave me the costume that [they] got from Marvel. They said, "You can go on back to the music room there and put it on and Andy will be down in a little bit." I carefully perched myself on top of the desk, and when he came out, I almost

With his Spidey-sense buzzing, Spider-Man leapt to life on network TV in April of 1977.

Before Spidey, Danny Seagren worked with Jim Henson and his growing puppet empire. Here he's pictured with a friend.

jumped on top of his head to another desk—scared the sh*t out of him. It did impress him. They looked at some people who were big muscular people who had lots of muscles, but they were pretty stiff and couldn't do the movements. I looked okay in the costume, and I did move."

The talented Seagren was a professional dancer and a puppeteer trained by Muppets creator Jim Henson during the sixties and early seventies. Having been familiar with the comics and the animated show, he used a lot of his dance techniques to establish the unusual rhythm of movements that became crucial to his portrayal. Without uttering a single word, the six-foot tall actor gave the hyperactive role the in-your-face attitude and appropriate coolness that would win over even the harshest comics aficionado. Adding another degree of mystery was the fact that Spider-Man's alter-ego of Peter Parker was never seen on-screen throughout the show. As stated in the lyrics of his catchy theme song by Gary William Friedman, "Where are you coming from, Spider-Man? Nobody knows who you are!"



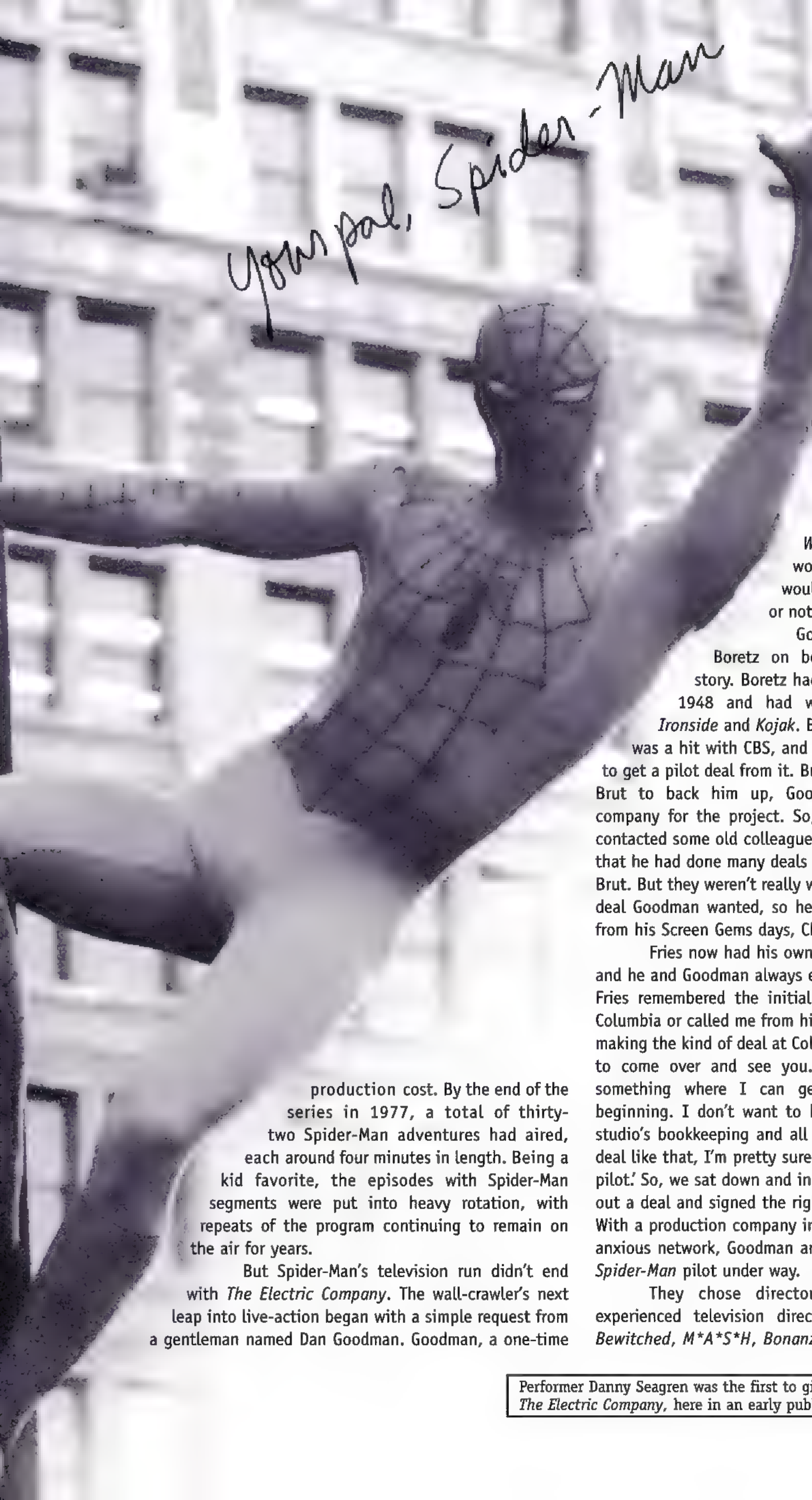
Spider-Man was on *The Electric Company* to help teach youngsters to read. A line of tie-in comics added to the fun.

Most of the Spider-Man scenes were filmed at Reeves-Teletape Studios—a pioneer in the then-revolutionary chroma key special effects—in New York City. "First time we shot," Danny recalled, "they had the costume they got from Marvel, which had webbing under the arms, and that was a big problem with the chroma key. It would key out. Part of the picture would fall out and just become transparent—there would be nothing there. The eyes [of the mask] were a white mesh, but if the lights were in your eyes—obviously there's a lot of lights on television—the cameras were less sensitive and even need a little bit more light. So there was a light in my eye. I usually worked on a chroma key backdrop, and usually they're blue but in this case were green because his costume was dominantly blue."

Being the new guy to the show, Danny insisted that there was no animosity shown towards him and Spider-Man by the cast. The segments were relatively easy shoots that were completed over a couple of hours in a day or two. Seagren described, "They weren't that difficult. They had been doing that show for a couple of years before I got there. I don't want to say it was 'pat' but by that time they knew what they were doing. The performers were good and they were really talented people. They knew their lines. The set-ups weren't that complicated and we would work with that crew for a year—the same crew that shot *Sesame Street* over at 81st and Broadway. There wasn't any jealousy in that cast at all."

During the show's run, *The Electric Company* aired one hundred thirty episodes per season; Spidey segments were limited to ten to twelve a season, because of the higher

What gives?! Why can't our friendly neighborhood hero (Danny Seagren) ever catch a break?



production cost. By the end of the series in 1977, a total of thirty-two Spider-Man adventures had aired, each around four minutes in length. Being a kid favorite, the episodes with Spider-Man segments were put into heavy rotation, with repeats of the program continuing to remain on the air for years.

But Spider-Man's television run didn't end with *The Electric Company*. The wall-crawler's next leap into live-action began with a simple request from a gentleman named Dan Goodman. Goodman, a one-time distribution executive at Screen Gems Television, had recently gone to work as a development executive for Brut Productions. He approached Marvel on his own, independent of Brut and was able to option the Spider-Man property from them. He then took his ideas to CBS Productions in New York who jumped at the chance to develop *Spider-Man*, given the network's recent smash success with both *The Incredible Hulk* and *Wonder Woman*. They immediately began work on a script, from which they would make their decision on whether or not to move ahead on an actual pilot. Goodman brought scriptwriter Alvin Boretz on board to craft *Spider-Man*'s pilot story. Boretz had been writing for television since 1948 and had worked on top-rated shows like *Ironside* and *Kojak*. Boretz's eventual *Spider-Man* script was a hit with CBS, and it looked like Goodman was going to get a pilot deal from it. But there was one problem: Without Brut to back him up, Goodman didn't have a production company for the project. So, he went back to California and contacted some old colleagues at Columbia Pictures, a company that he had done many deals through, both at Screen Gems and Brut. But they weren't really willing to come up with the type of deal Goodman wanted, so he looked up another old colleague from his Screen Gems days, Charles Fries.

Fries now had his own independent production company and he and Goodman always enjoyed working with one another. Fries remembered the initial call, "He either called me from Columbia or called me from his hotel and he said, 'I'm not really making the kind of deal at Columbia I'd like to have, and I'd like to come over and see you. I want to do a joint venture, something where I can get some money right from the beginning. I don't want to have to sit and wait for a major studio's bookkeeping and all that type of thing. If you'll do a deal like that, I'm pretty sure I have an order and I can make a pilot.' So, we sat down and in about thirty minutes, we knocked out a deal and signed the rights to a venture called 'Danchuk.'" With a production company in place, an approved script and an anxious network, Goodman and Fries jumped into getting their *Spider-Man* pilot under way.

They chose director E.W. Swackhamer, a highly-experienced television director who had done episodes of *Bewitched*, *M*A*S*H*, *Bonanza*, *Quincy*, *M.E.* and many others.

Performer Danny Seagren was the first to give Spider-Man life on TV's *The Electric Company*, here in an early publicity photo in New York.

He had a knack for handling series pilots and was the prime choice of both Goodman and Fries. Next came the casting. Many actors were considered, but the plum role of Spider-Man's true identity, Peter Parker, went to Washington, D.C. native Nicholas Hammond. The actor had been starring in major films since his early childhood, such as *Lord of the Flies* and *The Sound of Music*, but *Spider-Man* would be his first starring television role. Just prior to *Spider-Man*, he had been involved in theatrical work. "CBS network people came to see me in a play in L.A. and asked me to screen test," Hammond recalled, "[I did] a series of tests and interviews with the production people." Hammond also confirmed that he was only asked to audition for the part of Peter Parker, not that of Spider-Man. The producers saw a quality in him that stood out and he eventually landed the Peter Parker role. "They wanted a real actor, not a stuntman. I think that helped me," Hammond added. Even though he wasn't an avid follower of Spider-Man, Hammond did know about Peter Parker, "I was aware of the character, but hadn't really read it too often," he remembered. "Obviously I read the whole background on Peter's character once I got the job." After the lead was in place, the production's other crucial question had to be answered: What to do about Spider-Man?

Although he wasn't on board at the very beginning, a most important addition to the crew was stuntman/cameraman Fred Waugh. The renowned stunt veteran remembers how he got involved in the show, "I hate to admit it, but I never knew who Spider-Man was. A couple other guys had signed on to do the coordinating on the pilot and it was a little over their head because there was a lot of aerial stuff in there. So they called me and asked me if I wanted to do the show. I went over and talked to them, they gave me a script and I ended up doing the pilot for them." Fred Waugh would not only fill the role of the show's stunt coordinator and second unit director, but he also acted as an uncredited principal since he was the man who wore the Spider-Man suit for the majority of the series. "What happened was I looked better in the suit than (Hammond) did. So they just seemed to let me do everything." Additionally, having Waugh in the suit served an important practical purpose: They could double-up scenes and move the shooting along more quickly without having to wait for Hammond to get into costume. They could just have Waugh waiting as needed and simply shoot two scenes back-to-back.

The rest of the main cast consisted of a number of veteran performers, including David White as J. Jonah Jameson, Jeff Donnell as Aunt May and Hillie Hicks as Robbie Robertson. Sadly, Robertson, a regular cast member of the comics, was only seen in the pilot and did not return for the series. Introduced as a main character was Police Captain Barbera, played by Michael Pataki. The Captain seemed perpetually suspicious of Peter Parker and the fact that he was so often in close proximity to crimes around the city. Several of the other main characters from the comic stories were not used, including Peter's friend Mary Jane Watson and most importantly, Peter's Uncle Ben.

The man behind the mask, Danny Seagren reveals the face of Spider-Man to the world.

The production ran into the same problem as *The Electric Company* when it came time to do certain visual effects. They couldn't use blue screen because of the blue in Spider-Man's costume. In order to cut back on some of the expense of producing film opticals, most effects shots in the pilot were created on videotape. Videotape was cheaper and much easier to manipulate to complete effects shots. But the visual quality in the two media was very different – film looked far better. So all the processed effects shots in the pilot took a double hit. Unfortunately, they stuck out like sore thumbs, easily making these early video effect shots the weakest and least-convincing of the series.

For the live stuntwork, Fred Waugh was able to use a lot of innovative techniques in *Spider-Man*. He remembered, "I invented the helmet camera back in the early part of my career, tying it into the stuntwork. Put people where they'd never been before, on top of a sway pole, riding a horse or whatever," and of course, riding along with Spider-Man as he climbed walls! The helmet camera was used extensively in *Spider-Man*, and it put audiences in places they never would have been able to go normally. Inventing the device got Waugh into the cameraman's union in Hollywood. At the time, and possibly even to this day, he was the only stuntman/cameraman/stunt coordinator/director around—a very valuable asset to a production, indeed.

Waugh was also instrumental in conceiving most of the stunts and gags seen on the series. One of his visually thrilling gags even got written up in *Variety* because no one could figure out how it was done. It was a one-shot sequence that featured

Spider-Man leaping from the floor onto the ceiling, where he then spun around one-hundred eighty degrees and walked along it a few feet. It was an impressive and memorable shot that helped cement Waugh's place in the production. Equally as impressive was a freefall Spider-Man took, but with the helmet camera, the viewer was able to fall along with him. He finally stopped his descent by reaching out and grabbing a gargoyle on the side of a building. It was all done in first-person perspective, and was truly incredible to see.

When the pilot was shown to CBS executives, Fries recalled, "They liked it very much. What they did feel about this was it appealed to a younger audience, and that made it a little bit shaky as far as a full series order in primetime." Fries left feeling optimistic, but knew that a full series order could go either way. He would have to wait until the pilot was screened on the air before knowing what the network would do. At the same time CBS was mulling over the potential future of *Spider-Man*, Fries and Goodman went back to talk with Pat Williamson, Columbia Pictures' head of international television and theatrical distribution. They wanted to have international plans in place should the pilot get ordered for a series. This time, Columbia came back with a favorable deal and Williamson even had an idea of what to do with the pilot internationally. Fries recalled, "He took a look at it and said, 'Hey, this is a ninety-minute pilot,' which meant seventy-four minutes of film, 'do you have any more film that we could make a longer version and maybe release this as a theatrical in foreign [markets]?' What was I going to answer? Of course! So I went back and scraped up every foot of film we had off the cutting room floor and we stretched it to ninety-three minutes." The international release of the first *Spider-Man* pilot film was very successful for Fries and Goodman and it ended up grossing about nine million dollars. More than that, it proved *Spider-Man* would be a viable property for them.

When the *Spider-Man* pilot aired on CBS on Tuesday, April 19, 1977, its viewership was solid. NTI ratings numbers from the time show that the pilot scored a 17.8 rating with a 30 share, not too shabby for a first-time feature-length pilot. It also left CBS executives with the same problem they had predicted upon its screening: *Spider-Man* attracted viewers that were younger than their advertisers liked. So despite its initial success, the *Spider-Man* project sat on the back burner for a while until they decided what they wanted to do with it... if anything.

The plot for the pilot involved a mad hypnotist who was taking control of people so he could use them to rob banks. After, they would have no memories of the crimes they committed. While it was an interesting pilot and it scored well, Spider-Man's main villain wasn't exactly the most enigmatic ever seen on screen. He looked like any other guy off the street. No, the excitement in this show was in seeing a real Spider-Man, live and moving, shooting webs and sticking to walls just like he should. It was more than enough to capture the interest of the kids watching the show, and was most surely the talk of school playgrounds around the country the next day.

Slight changes were made to the characters for the pilot. Instead of being a high school-aged outsider, this production's Peter Parker was an older college graduate student and part-time freelance photographer. He worked his way through college by selling pictures to the *Daily Bugle* newspaper and he lived in the

The Web-Spinner (Fred Waugh) on the wall behind Robert F. Simon, Chip Fields, Nicholas Hammond and Ellen Bry in a cast shot from the second season of Spider-Man.

attic of his Aunt May's house. The way he became Spider-Man was similar to the familiar comic origin. Peter and another college student are experimenting with radioactive materials in a laboratory isolation area when a spider is accidentally exposed to the materials and irradiated. The spider later gets loose and bites Peter on the hand as he is getting ready to leave the lab for the night. He doesn't think much about the bite, but soon after as he is in an alleyway, a car driven by one of the mind-controlled individuals approaches him. He leaps towards a wall to escape getting hit by the car but when he does, he discoveres he can simply climb up it with no problem. After experimenting with his newfound powers, Parker decides to take on the mind-control case and figures out what is going on, thus giving birth to Spider-Man. As mentioned earlier, in the Spider-Man comics, Peter's reason for getting into crimefighting was far more personal. He inadvertently caused the death of his Uncle Ben by allowing a criminal to get past him without trying to stop him—the same criminal who later ended up killing his Uncle. Without this powerful Uncle Ben motivation, Peter's reasoning to risk his life by stopping criminals in the series is far more vague.

Seeing this "real" Spider-Man was certainly a fascinating thing, even though kids were sure to notice the subtle differences between Spider-Man's TV costume and his comic version. For one thing, on TV,

An early location photo with Los Angeles standing in for New York City.

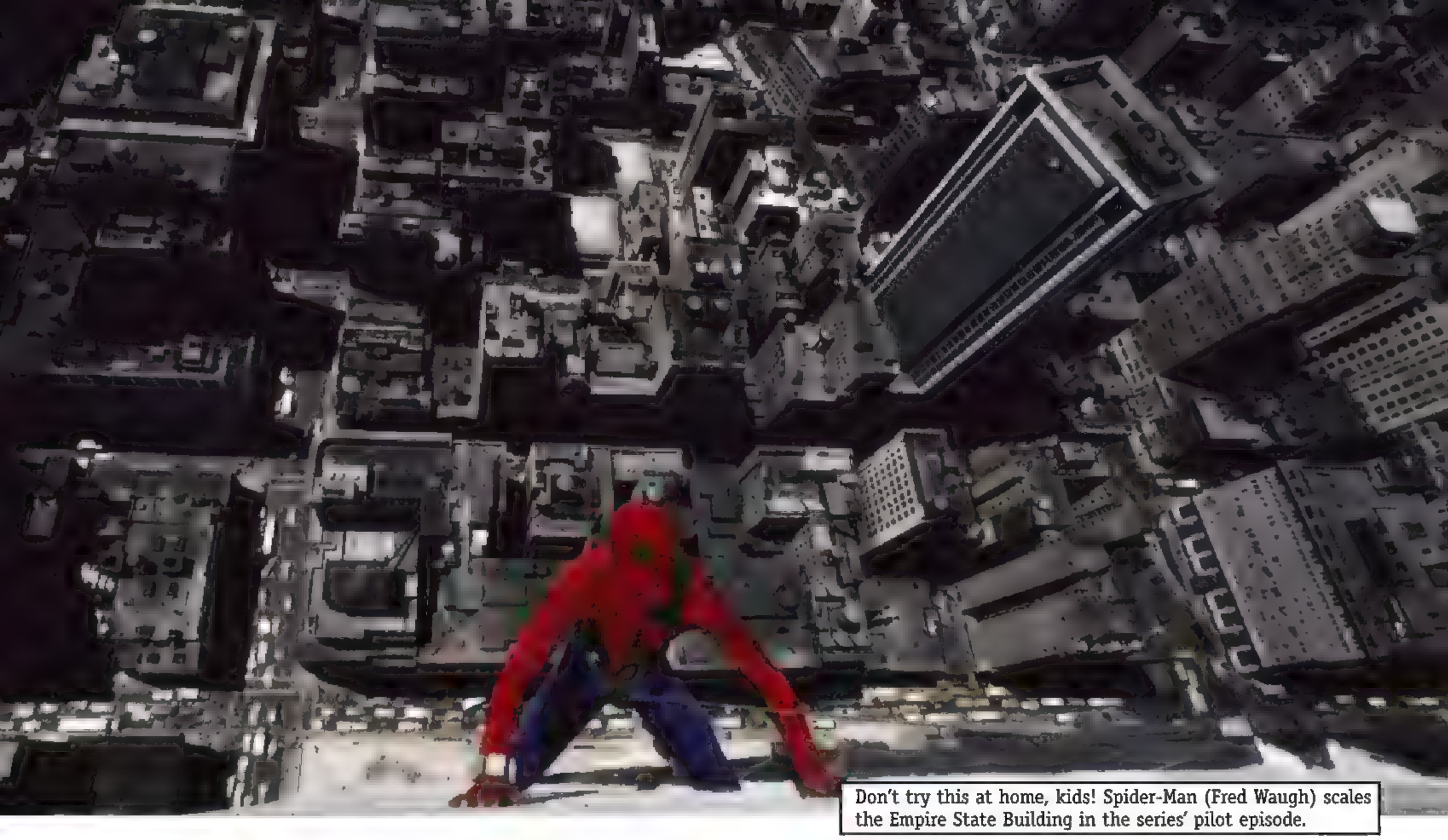
he had a belt with a special Spider-themed buckle which he wore. Also, his eyes looked different from the ones kids were used to seeing in comics. And finally, the TV Spider-Man carried a single, bulky webshooter on his right wrist. This device, more than anything else, made the outfit look different. The costume itself was a simple bodysuit with the appropriate designs added. In this, at least, it looked quite a bit like the comic version. It was red and blue with the same web and spider motif.

"The suit was very hot and they had trouble working out the eyes so they wouldn't steam up," Hammond recalled, "Some sort of plastic with tiny holes in them. But I didn't actually wear it too often; it was mainly Freddie Waugh." Waugh continued, remembering the ordeals of working with the mask, "Yeah, the headpiece was a real problem because the glasses they had in there would fog up. I couldn't see anything. Finally we ended up drilling really small holes into the glass so they would breathe and your eye would focus to those small holes so you could see pretty decent, especially to do a fight or anything like that. It was a bear. I'd put that thing on and I'd have to hold my breath to keep it from fogging up. They'd say 'action,' I'd do what I do and by the time I got through I couldn't see where I was." Careful study of publicity photos and episodes shows at least two other different types of eyepieces were used, although Waugh only remembered the mirrored type. In the pilot, the eyes appeared to be made of solid reflective discs. At another early point white fabric was used on the mask, but it may have only been for early costume tests or distance shots.

It took a full season, but CBS did eventually come back to Fries and Goodman with the good news that *Spider-Man* would get another run. Instead of giving them a full, or even half-season commitment, they decided on a five-hour trial run to be aired in the 1978 mid-season. The network still had its reservations about the age group the show would attract. "It skewed in the teens and they want eighteen to thirty-nine. They didn't want to service the teenage market in primetime. But they liked the idea of having it to punch in and we never quite knew when they were going to go on the air. We gave them the episodes and they punched them in where they thought they would work on a pre-emptive basis," according to Fries.

As usual in the world of television, by the time CBS decided to commit to their trial episodes for the series, it was already crunch time. It was around late November, 1977 that Fries and Goodman were given the go-head and CBS wanted the first of their episodes to air in late March or early April of the following year. The actors had been retained in contracts and all of the main people came back, save for David White, who was replaced by Robert J. Simons in the role of J. Jonah Jameson. Added to the cast was actress Chip Fields as Mr. Jameson's brassy receptionist Rita, who stuck up for Peter every chance she could. For Fred Waugh, he had a special ace in the hole. He was given a bit of interesting "off-the-record" news by the pilot's director after CBS had seen it. Waugh remembered, "Swackhamer said, 'Fred, CBS thinks you're the only guy in town who can play this part.'" Because of his experience and versatility, CBS wasn't interested in looking at anyone else to fill his role and they were willing to pay for it. Waugh got an agent to negotiate specifically for this deal, and he ended up getting very well paid.

Spider-Man (veteran stuntman Fred Waugh) descends a building in downtown Los Angeles.



Don't try this at home, kids! Spider-Man (Fred Waugh) scales the Empire State Building in the series' pilot episode.

With the success of the initial pilot internationally, Fries, Goodman and Williamson decided it was a good road to follow. Fries explained, "What we did each time we got an order [for a season], we asked them for a two-parter that we could put together for a foreign feature. So we ended up releasing three theatrical films in foreign. One of them was the pilot and the other two were two-parters." And why not? Two-hour shows are good for kicking off or ending a season and since CBS didn't have any stake in the international distribution of the series, anything Fries and Goodman could do outside of North America was complete profit for them. Everyone won.

Since the producers were under pressure to produce their episodes in a hurry, CBS suggested a writer/director team with whom they had had success in the past. Enter Robert Janes and Ron Satlof. The two had been working at CBS for the *Hawaii 5-0* production when they were called in to get *Spider-Man* done on schedule. The deal was for five total hours of television—three standalone episodes and a two-hour film. Janes recalled his hiring and initial involvement, "Ron and I were hired to write, produce and direct. Ron is going to direct the two-hour and produce part of the time and I'm going to write the two-hour and produce part of the time. We're going to farm out the other three shows. It's a big rush so we kind of have to do it all at once."

But complicating matters before the beginning of the shoot was the fact that several key elements Janes and Satlof had been promised were taken care of... were not. "The story was that it was all worked out," Janes said, "because there were all these gimmicks that had to be handled. Spider-Man had to go up the wall and he had to shoot webs at people and that stuff. The pilot, which they showed us, didn't work. The effects in it didn't work at all. When we got there to do it, it was supposed to have been fixed, but it wasn't fixed."

The colors on Spider-Man's suit continued to pose a problem for inexpensive optical effects and chroma key, so the only solution Satlof and Janes saw was to do practical stuntwork—to actually have their stuntperson climbing the walls and swinging on "webs" from place to place. All the wall-climbing effects would be done live with cables. The technique got them by, yet there were still problems trying to get it to work correctly. Janes remembered, "We shot this thing in January and February. I guess we must have shot about thirty-five days of first unit in the wettest winter in Southern California in the twentieth century. We were constantly dealing with rain and getting the guy on the side of the building. Even if the sun would come out a little bit or it would be a little bit dry, the stuntman's feet would slip as they cabled him up, so it didn't look like he was walking. Then when it started to dry out and it got warm, the old buildings, which absorbed water during the rain, would expel water as the sun came out. So the buildings were still wet. We had this ongoing nightmare of how to get the guy on the building."

Fred Waugh recalled additional hurdles with the cabling. "We didn't have the luxury of wire-removal back in those days, so we had to hide the cable. You'd hide the cable in the shadows, find a building where the shadow would get in a crack there so you could hide it back in there. We were using one-eighth inch cable. They'd pull on one-eighth, and travel on one-sixteenth. The travel cable is what kept me sucked in to the wall. We climbed about eight stories; if you climbed anything

On top of the world, Fred Waugh cools off atop the Empire State Building.

higher than that, you'd get so much slack in the middle of the cable that you started drifting away from the wall. You couldn't get your feet on the wall. Of all the time I climbed, I never could solve the climbing part; it always looked clumsy to me. Going up was always a problem. But coming down, that was as real as it could be because it was in my shoulders, upside-down. I could literally run down the side of a wall."

As if that wasn't headache enough, the other main part of Spider-Man's arsenal, his webs, proved to be yet another major obstacle for the production. Indeed in the pilot, the webs and nets Spider-Man shot looked decidedly flimsy, nothing more than strands of loosely-bunched thread that resembled Halloween-style cobwebs. Janes described the situation, "They told us they had this worked out—that there was a kind of a liquid foam thing that was going to shoot out and create this net, and we were going to be able to do it that way. So they did a test and it looked like somebody squirting whipped cream out of the guy's arm. So once again we're screwed and we have no time to do anything. We don't have the time to do some big film visual effect which would involve somebody actually painting the web on frame-by-frame—essentially animating over the images. So we went back to the old way that had been done with things like this in the past. We would start with the net such as it was, the web—which always looked awful—on the people who had been snared, then you'd jerk this thing off, and then reverse the film. It got us by. Needless to say, you couldn't show it for very long because it just didn't work!" Most of the scenes where Spider-Man shot his webs were accomplished with very short, quick cuts and an accompanying whip-crack sound effect.

The results worked well enough to be used in the final product, and they were far better than the earlier attempts at optical effects. Watching a real person climb real walls ended up being one of the great hallmarks of this *Spider-Man* production, especially when the climbing sequences were edited together with shots from the helmet camera. They provided dizzying views of the height and perspective that Spider-Man would really have seen way up there.

Work on the five hours of the first season of *Spider-Man* happened extremely quickly. Only about thirty-five days of principal shooting were done, and the production was shooting one thing or another for a full seven days a week. As the last story, "The Deadly Dust", was being shot, it was scheduled by CBS to be the first one to air as the two-hour season opener. So by the end of the shoot the pressure was really on to get everything completed.

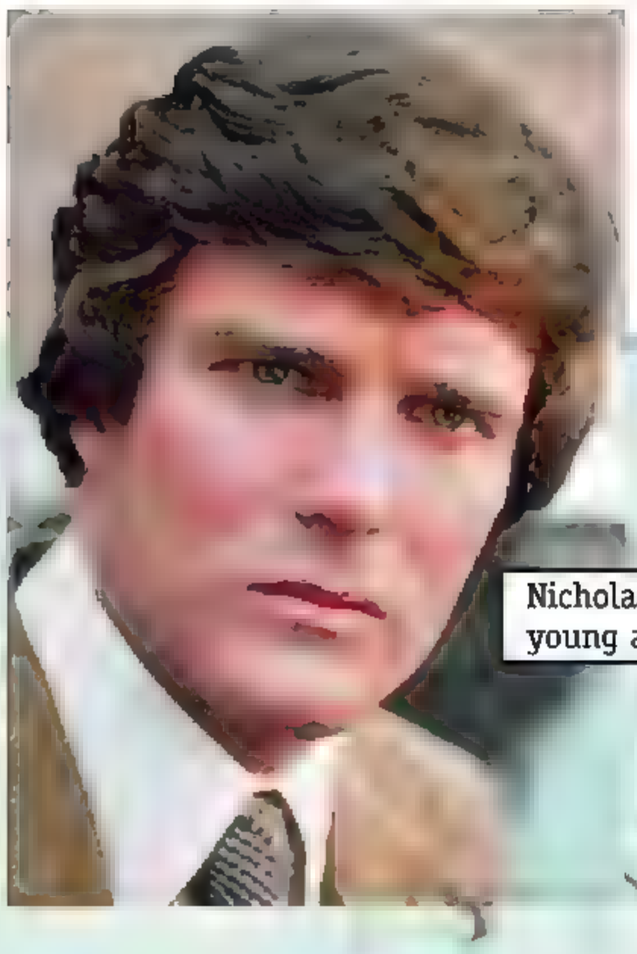
Another factor working against the production at all times was the fact that *Spider-Man* was a low-budget show. Robert Janes described, "They were low. They were low by any standard; I mean compared to today, nothing. I think we probably spent about four-hundred, four-hundred-fifty thousand an hour. But you have to remember that at the time, *Hawaii 5-0* was only spending about six hundred thousand and it was a hit. Then after that I went to *Charlie's Angels* and we were only spending about six-fifty. So, four-hundred was not that bad, but it wasn't good." One of the ways the production saved money was by keeping sets to a minimum," Janes continued, "Everybody does a lot of location shooting. When your budgets were as low as that was, one of the ways you save money is by not building anything. So you get out there on the street and

shoot into real life. So that way you didn't have to put extras back there or cars and all that business. It just felt more real; such as it was. Funny to be saying it felt real when you're talking about Spider-Man, but we sort of filled it out with real life."

One of the criticisms against the series was that it didn't explore any of what the characters were really feeling. It was an opinion that Spider-Man's creator, Stan Lee shared. "It was so basic. It had none of the humor. It had none of the drama—none of the intense human relationships that we tried to put in. It was just by-the-numbers." The lack of human drama was not necessarily the fault of the writers or staff of the show, however. Robert Janes explained, "We tried to [add it], but in many cases we couldn't, and CBS was not interested particularly in character development there. They were interested in the action. The only time that we really ever had time for it was where we had two hours to fill so we could actually do something. That one aired first so I think the audience kind of got it." What Janes mentioned was from his "The Deadly Dust" episode where Peter Parker and another reporter have a scene discussing what Spider-Man must be feeling. Hammond agreed, "We wanted to delve into a real romance for Peter, much as they did in the recent films. We tried to create somebody very real who just happened to have this power imposed upon him." Janes added, "In fact, one of the problems we have is that Spider-Man has nobody to talk to. It was not a problem for Stan because he just put a balloon over his head and said, 'I think I'll go across town.' We couldn't do that. We had to find ways to get out what Spider-Man was thinking."

Most of the staff and cast remember meeting with Lee over the course of the series' run. Fries recalled, "He had consultation rights and that type of thing, but he didn't have any creative controls or approval rights. So he was never, I don't think totally happy." Stan, in fact, wasn't happy with the way the series turned out. Lee continued, "*Spider-Man*, I felt, was a mess. I had a long talk with people explaining my version and how I felt it should be done. But they didn't follow that at all, and I remember I was really upset." But Lee knew he had talented people working on the show, "It wasn't the fault of the actor, who was quite good. He did what he was told. It wasn't the fault of the special effects guy and the stuntman, who actually climbed up the side of a building held up with ropes and stuff—it wasn't tricky camera work, he actually risked his life to do that. The people working on the show were good and did their best. It was the show runners; the directors had the totally wrong idea." Nicholas Hammond remembered talking with Lee early on and hashing out ideas about Peter Parker's portrayal, and Fred Waugh counts Lee as a good friend after meeting him on the series.

Spider-Man's first five episodes drew a large amount of viewers. The series scored an impressive 21.2 rating with a 34 share during its April 5 to May 3, 1978 airing. These ratings made *Spider-Man* the number one children's program across all three networks. With numbers like these, *Spider-Man* should have been hard for CBS to ignore. Again, it wasn't immediately greenlit for another season. The network was still wary and took a few more months before finally ordering up another batch of new episodes. This time they okayed a



Nicholas Hammond as Peter Parker, the young actor's first series leading role.

Poised on the roof of a building in Los Angeles, Spider-Man (Fred Waugh) sports one of many different styles of eye lenses used in the costumes.

whopping eight hours total, including six standalone episodes and another two-hour telefilm.

Once again, the fact that the show was playing to younger audiences worked against it in the network's eyes. Charles Fries recalled trying to get a larger commitment from CBS, "I was down on bended knee quite regularly. It may have had some ratings, but it wasn't reaching the marketplace the advertisers want to reach, which from their point-of-view is one of the most important things. You can have a good show, good ratings and still not reach the target audience, and there you are. That was my remembrance of the basic problem why we couldn't get a full season's run for it. I met several times on this trying to get a longer, extended order, but they were pretty adamant that that was about what they were going to do." While it must have been frustrating, Fries and Goodman did not turn down CBS' eight-hour offer for the next season.

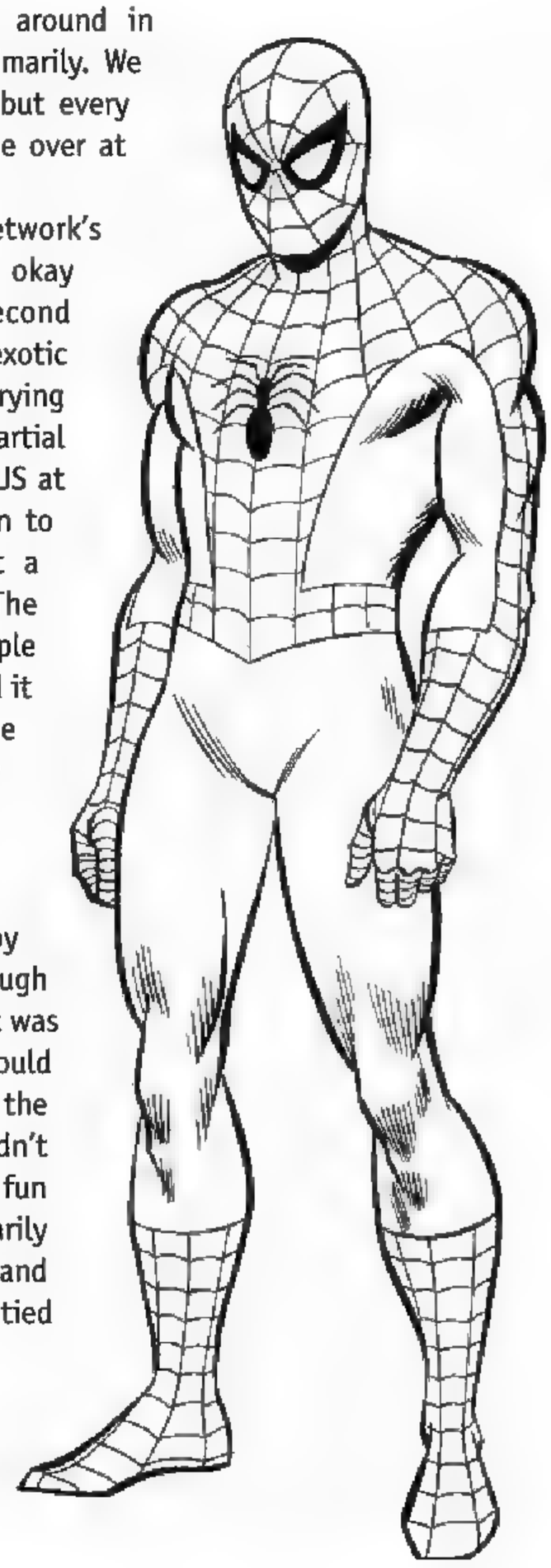
By the time the second run for *Spider-Man* was okayed, much of the crew that had worked on the first five hours of the series had moved on to other productions. An almost entirely new crew came in for the next set of episodes, including producer Lionel Siegel and writer/story editor Howard Dimsdale. With them came a fresh set of ideas for the show. The most immediate difference to note was the introduction of actress Ellen Bry, playing Julie Masters, a friendly rival photographer for the *Register* newspaper. A regular character for this second season, she and Peter would always show up at the same scenes to cover stories. The pair enjoyed flirting and pushing one another's buttons. That allowed her to be a bit of a sounding board for Peter, someone with whom he could share his thoughts and frustrations without giving away his secret.

With Spidey's new direction, the series seemed to be picking up momentum with tighter storylines and more action. The producers also tried to inject a little romance into the series with the Julie Masters character and in the final two-hour telefilm where Peter falls for the story's lead actress. Fred Waugh was finally officially credited as a second unit director, which he had been effectively doing since he got involved with the pilot. A little more money was obviously spent on these eight hours as well, since the production was afforded the luxury of shooting on location in cities like New York and Hong Kong.

Waugh and Fries recalled screening a specific stunt that was shot while in New York for the "A Matter of State" episode. Part of the episode was shot at the Empire State Building, where Waugh did an exterior climb from its seventy-second floor to a setback and parapet on its eightieth floor. Waugh remembered, "Chuck Fries, he was the producer of *Spider-Man*. I took the camera off the helmet and was running down the parapet. I just climbed up on to the parapet wall which is about twelve inches wide. I used to be a wirewalker so stuff like that never bothered me. But I pointed the camera down running on my feet, so you saw my feet and my legs running down this narrow concrete wall eighty floors in the air. Chuck had to get up and leave the room. Fries confirmed, saying, "I think one of the most exciting shots of the whole series was when Waugh was walking along the parapet of the Empire State Building with that helmet, the camera helmet on and he's looking down at the street. That's scary! I got a little shaky in the screening room!" Looking at the episode, it is also fun to see the shocked looks on people's faces on the street when they realize they're actually seeing Spider-Man crawling outside the Empire State Building.

For most of the series, production took place in downtown Los Angeles in some of the city's oldest districts. This was done to give the appearance that the series was taking place in New York City, without having to go to the expense of filming there every week. The series was mostly shot in a building located on Fifth and Spring in downtown LA, including many of the exterior shots, stuntwork and much of the interiors. First season producer Robert Janes explained, "We had no studio, but we shot a lot downtown and there was this empty bank building. We built the office that was supposed to be the newspaper office on a floor in that building. Which was where we were basically doing all that cabling and all that work as much as possible so we had a place to control it." Waugh also remembered the building: "Yeah, that was the corner of Fifth and Spring. It was an old business building. I think it was an old hotel back in the early days. I remember going in and kind of roaming around in there. We used that building primarily. We built the sets inside there too, but every once in a while we'd go on stage over at CBS-Radford."

Undoubtedly, the network's biggest undertaking was to okay *Spider-Man* to shoot the second season's two-part story in the exotic locale of Hong Kong. Probably trying to capitalize on the kung-fu/martial arts mania spreading across the US at the time, Peter Parker has reason to travel to the Orient to protect a friend of Mr. Jameson's. The production filmed there for a couple of weeks and the cast remembered it being a great time had by all. "The people of Hong Kong went crazy when they saw me in the suit," Hammond recalled, "whereas New Yorkers recognized me as Peter Parker with the corduroy jacket with leather patches." Waugh remembered similar instances: "It was great. It was as good as you could get. When they found out I was the costume character, they couldn't leave me alone. We had a lot of fun over there. We went over primarily for the building to do the climb and to do all the beauty shots which tied



A hallmark Spider-Man drawing by one of the character's signature artists, John Romita.

in to the show. But most of the sets were right back here in the States." "The Chinese Web" would end up being the last new *Spider-Man* production aired by CBS.

The bulk of *Spider-Man*'s second season episodes ran irregularly from September 5, 1978 through February 21, 1979. There were often month-long breaks between new episodes, but CBS held back "The Chinese Web" Spider-Man film until July 6, 1979—more than four months after the previous new episode. Upon that special's airing, *Spider-Man* was finally done. CBS had done what none of Spider-Man's major nemeses could ever do: they killed the character in a long, slow process that dragged out over a couple years. But what had he done to deserve to be so unceremoniously and quietly dumped?

Spider-Man was cancelled not because of low ratings and not because of negative audience reaction, but partially due to the demographics it attracted and also because of the concerns of then-CBS president William Paley. CBS had major hits with *The Incredible Hulk* and *Wonder Woman*, and all indications seemed to show that *Spider-Man* could have been another substantial draw for the network. But an offhand remark to Paley by one of his friends put an end to CBS' affiliation with anything in a colorful costume. The basic story, told by Robert Janes, Fred Waugh and others, was that at some point in mid-to-late 1979, one of Paley's close friends made a crack that CBS was going from the Tiffany Network, as it had been called to reflect its high class of programming, to the Comic Book Network.

A collection of children's storybooks and guidebooks based on Toei's TV *Spider-Man*.

Within a year, most of the comic book-based programs were gone from CBS' lineup, leaving both the public and production personnel surprised and scratching their heads. Hammond remembered, "We were stunned, as indeed it did very well, although once they started moving the time slot and then pre-empting it for a few weeks, the audience had a hard time finding us!" Charles Fries added, "I don't recall that it being any major upheaval of any sort. We got word like we usually got word, 'We're not going to pick you up.' You ask questions and you never know whether the answers are true or not."

Even though *Spider-Man* was done on network TV, Fries and Goodman still had a small bit of filming left to finish. Fries explained, "In order to make the episodes work in domestic syndication after the network run, the best way to sell these would be as television movies rather than as like fourteen or fifteen episodes. So, we shot connecting footage where they ran into the office, into the editor, and said, 'I've got another story for you!', then ta-da, that was a two-part, two-hour television movie." For a number of years after, *Spider-Man* would show up as a series of feature-length programs. Since that time, the original deals have expired. "In the case of *Spider-Man*, we not only lost the rights, we lost the rights to distribute and we lost the films. They reverted to Marvel," said Fries. The same is true of Columbia's foreign distribution deals, all of their rights have expired and are no longer in effect. If the original live-action *Spider-Man* is to be seen again, it will be through Marvel Comics' guidance.

Despite the problems and constraints the show had, everyone remembered working on it as a good thing. "I think some of these episodes are as good as the theatrical films." Fries said, "I mean, we didn't have the money or the capabilities because we didn't have computer-generated stuff and digital and all the things that you have today. We were working in the dark ages for Christ's sake." Fries continued, "When you're doing episode after episode, you're up against the gun a little bit. Although we didn't have as much pressure as you'd normally have if you were making twenty or thirty episodes a year. But I still thought they were pretty good myself." Robert Janes summed up his experience on *Spider-Man*, "It was fun. It was totally bizarre, but it was an amazing experience. It was an adventure. Nick Hammond was really good, one of those really nice guys. Fred was a great Spider-Man; he really created all those images that happened. I think we couldn't have done it without Fred being as agile as he was." Fred Waugh added, "It's amazing how many people come up to me when they find out I did the original series. They tell me they enjoy the original series more than they enjoy the features. I can't say that, because I enjoy the features much more than what we did. I had a good crew. Good effects crew – it was just a lot of fun. I mean it was beautiful, I had a free hand. It's got to be one of the best things to ever happen to me in the motion picture business."

"[I'm] proud of what we all did under the circumstances," concludes Nicholas Hammond, "It was a sharp learning curve carrying my own prime-time series, and the responsibility of

knowing many people's jobs depended on the show's success. It was all a pleasure with very nice people. Very nice, hard-working and good. I am always amazed at how many people remember the show, and fondly."

Spider-Man had a jumpy start and brief stay on television, but the series still left a large impact on the youngsters that watched it. It was heavily promoted and covered in magazines at the time, and kids were obviously eager to see a real live Spider-Man doing what he did best. The series was watched and received well, but even aside from the network's misgivings, it suffered from the problem a lot of other superhero shows have—the lack of costumed super villains. In Spider-Man's case, the weekly budget probably didn't allow for expensive custom wardrobes every week plus the additional effects and stuntwork they would have required. It was much simpler to just have your everyday bad guy in a three-piece suit. But who knows, with one less trip to New York or Hong Kong, perhaps viewers could have been treated to a visit from the Scorpion, the Vulture or the Green Goblin.

Since the end of the series, *Spider-Man* has been continually knocked as a low-rated, unimpressive program. While some of the stories may have been rough around the edges, and it was changed a great deal from its comic origins, there's no denying that the program stands well on its own and that it did have a charm to it. Its actors were committed to their parts and *Spider-Man*'s storylines were certainly no less believable than any other comic-based project shown at the time. On its ratings alone, *Spider-Man* should have received at least a couple full season orders' worth of episodes. It simply had the unfortunate combination of an undesired age demographic draw, which led to lack of network support and a spotty schedule. When CBS swung the axe on their comic-based programs, *Spider-Man* was the first to go.

But Marvel's flagship character had yet another live-action story to tell... In late 1977, while *Spider-Man* was beginning its run on CBS' schedule in America, Marvel Comics finalized an international deal that allowed the Japanese Toei Company to exploit any of its comic characters for a period of three years. Out of all the possible choices, Toei decided to create a version of Spider-Man. Possibly this was because the character was known in Japan, having already appeared in a series of stories in the Japanese *Monthly Boys' Magazine* starting in 1970. Although the *Boys' Magazine* adventures stayed a lot truer to the American comic storylines, Toei's version would be something newly-tailored for Japanese television viewers.

Spider-Man began its run on Japanese airwaves just a few days after the American *Spider-Man*'s first season ended. It ran from Wednesday, May 17, 1978 through March 14, 1979 for a total of forty-one half-hour episodes. In an interesting twist, *Spider-Man* was not promoted as an American hero. Most Japanese youngsters had no idea of his American origins and Toei did not go out of their way to tell them differently. Most Japanese youngsters saw Spider-Man as an original Japanese character. But the circumstances of Spider-Man's Japanese origins were so completely changed from the American stories, that he may as well have been. No longer was he named Peter Parker; the Japanese Spider-Man's identity was that of Takuya Yamashiro, a motorcycle racer with a younger brother and sister and a scientist father who studies outer space.

Young Takuya is pulled into an intergalactic battle between an evil organization called the Iron Cross Group, commanded by Professor Monster, and Prince Garia, the wounded lone survivor of the Spider Planet that the Iron Cross Group destroyed. Prince Garia escapes the Spider Planet in a ship called the Marveler and heads for Earth, but Professor Monster follows him. Meanwhile on Earth, Takuya begins seeing visions of a spider and hearing voices in his head. Prince Garia has chosen him to be the new pilot for the Marveler and is communicating with him telepathically while traveling to Earth. By the time Garia crash lands on Earth, the evil Iron Cross Group has already arrived and set up a female agent named Amazoness to work undercover as Saeko Yoshida at a weekly women's magazine. Her goal is to infiltrate Earth's culture.

John Romita remarked, "Japan equated Spider-Man with very original thinking and unexpected stuff. I always thought that was great!" The evidence is clear with Leopardon, Spider-Man's giant robot, with Spidey himself at the controls.

Takuya's father goes to investigate the crash site only to be ambushed by a monster that Amazoness has sent there. The Scientist is badly injured and Prince Garia puts out another telepathic call to Takuya. Without hesitation, Takuya rushes to the scene just in time to hear his father's last words. Then Takuya himself is ambushed by a group of Iron Cross soldiers. But when he tries to escape, he falls through a hole in the ground, into the Marveler and injures himself badly. The barely-living Garia, still inside the Marveler, slips a device called the Spider Bracelet on Takuya's wrist. The Bracelet injects him with a substance called Spider-X that increases his strength and speed and Takuya is reborn as Spider-Man. Unfortunately, it is Prince Garia's last act—he dies, leaving Takuya to carry on the battle against the Iron Cross by himself.

Garia left Takuya a multitude of special devices to help in his fight. First was the Spider Bracelet which could shoot Spider Strings. Spider-Man used them for numerous purposes, such as swinging on them from place to place, or using them like nets and traps to capture enemies. He also had the Marveler, a massive ship that could be called into action via the Spider Bracelet. The bracelet contained the Spider Protector, which was the Spider-Man suit Takuya wore that made him nearly invulnerable and also allowed him to stick to walls and ceilings. Additionally, he had a vehicle called the GP-7, which was capable of high speeds and flight. When the GP-7 docked with the Marveler, Takuya could order, "Marveler, change Leopardon!", and the two craft would transform into a 60-meter tall, human-shaped robot named Leopardon. Takuya sat in Leopardon to pilot it and fight the evil creatures from the Iron Cross.

Actor Kosuke Kayama portrayed Takuya Yamashiro, and rounding out the cast were Yabuki Yoshiharu as Takyua's little brother Takuji, Izumi Oyama as his younger sister Shinko, and Rika Miura as his girlfriend Hitomi – none of whom knew about Takuya's secret. Famed member of the Japan Action Club (JAC) stunt team Hirofumi Koga portrayed Spider-Man in costume. All of the stunts were performed by members of the JAC, who would later go on to become some of the hottest stuntmen around when the Sentai shows gained major popularity. Like the American version of *Spider-Man*, all the stunts in Japan were performed live in front of the camera.

Producer Susumu Yoshikawa explained, "In order to make everything look real, we didn't use any special effects. Stuntman Hirofumi Koga climbed buildings of 30 meters or more with one life rope. The largest building Koga climbed was eleven stories high. Three staff members would pull the rope up on the roof of a building to make it look like Koga was climbing and sticking to the wall." Problems with hiding the rope were pretty much the same as the American production. "At the beginning of the program, we hid the rope by editing. But the editing effects didn't look very good." Yoshikawa continued, "Therefore, we changed the angle of cameras to avoid shooting the rope. Scenes crawling on the ceiling were done the same way. During the production, the staff was very nervous because they worried about the accidents involving the cast. That's a good example of Toei's company policy, 'If you don't have any money, use your body!'"

The Spider suit in Toei's version was very close to the original American version—again, save for the addition of the Spider Bracelet on his left wrist. The fabric appeared to be a shiny spandex-type material that worked quite well. This Spider-Man did not wear a utility belt, and his eyes were made with a white fabric, rather than mirrored lenses. Occasionally, the eyes would appear to be a gold color, perhaps because they used a different material that allowed for greater visibility during stuntwork. To get into the costume, Takuya would press a button on the Spider Bracelet, and the Spider Protector would shoot out, much like the Flash's costume would come out of his ring in comic books. It would drape over Takuya and in a succession of quick cuts, (which included a shot of a zipper on his back with accompanying sound effect), he was in costume and ready to go.

It was definitely wild stuff when compared to the American version of *Spider-Man*. The program aired in Japan when there was a lack of live-action hero shows on television. It came after *Ultraman*, *Kamen Rider*, *Go Ranger* and *Kikaider*, but before the major explosion of other Sentai shows. At the time of its airing, *Spider-Man* was the only game in town and kids went crazy for it. *Spider-Man* was heavily promoted in Japan where the character appeared in books, serialized comic stories, toys,

Like Fred Waugh in America, Japan's Spider-Man was also played by one of their premier stuntmen, Hirofumi Koga.

records and more. Spider-Man was the only Marvel property Toei adapted for live-action television.

Spider-Man was a rousing success in Japan, featuring lively stuntwork from Japan's premiere stunt company and accomplished actors and directors who went on to star in and produce a number of popular follow-up programs. The series' music was written by Chunmei Watanabe, who created the soundtracks for other popular shows such as *Kikaider* and *Mazinger Z*. *Spider-Man* also has the distinction of having the first appearance of a live-action giant robot in the history of Toei's TV programming. Thanks to *Spider-Man*'s success, the Sentai genre was revived and is still going strongly to this day.

For many years *Spider-Man* was in rights limbo due to the original short-term contracts between Marvel and Toei, but new agreements were recently worked out, allowing Toei to exploit their version of Spider-Man in Japan again. Interestingly, the Toei deal for *Spider-Man* didn't block the live-action American version from being shown in Japan as well. Fries and Goodman's *Spider-Man* production was shown on Japanese television and released on a series of videotapes where it was more commonly available than Toei's own version.

But that changed after the new agreements when Toei's entire series was finally released as a DVD box set in Japan in December 2005. A new metal toy of Spider-Man's robot Leopardon was released a year later. Starting March 3, 2009, American audiences finally got their first official chance to see Toei's very different version of *Spider-Man*. The marvel.com website began adding English-subtitled episodes at the rate of one per week. As far as we can determine, this version of *Spider-Man* remains the only fully-licensed, foreign-produced live-action TV program for an American comic hero. Marvel has done *Spider-Man* fans a real service by making these rarely-seen episodes available.

Spider-Man hasn't been seen in a new live-action production on television since the late 1970s. Whether or not this will change remains to be seen. With the massive success of the three *Spider-Man* feature films, anything could now be possible. With a forty-plus year, multiple-title comic book life, there is obviously no shortage of Spider-Man tales left to tell.

Spider-Man in his vehicle, the Spider Machine GP-7.

A series planning notebook (top) and scripts for the first two episodes of Toei's *Spider-Man* (middle and bottom).

Spider-Man leaps into action against the Deep-sea King, from episode eleven of Toei's *Spider-Man* production.

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chapter 7

LEGENDS OF THE SUPERHEROES

If you thought it was a mirage that you had seen a primetime network television special with the biggest gathering of DC superheroes ever assembled—it wasn't a hoax, it wasn't a dream, but something that happened (and could only happen) in the seventies!

Legends of The Superheroes consisted of two hour-long specials that aired 8 P.M on NBC a week apart: "The Challenge" (January 18, 1979) and "The Roast" (January 25, 1979). The shows were a rare live-action effort from Hanna-Barbera, the very same producers of *The Super Friends* cartoons that ran throughout the seventies and eighties and featured almost all of DC Comics' key characters. Although it was a comedy show, complete with laugh track, the most significant attraction was that it marked the final television appearance of Adam West and Burt Ward, in costume, as Batman and Robin. Without West, Ward and Frank Gorshin (returning as The Riddler in only "The Challenge" installment), *Legends* may never have been filmed. Other than them, the cast consisted of mostly unknowns and character actors.

The specials were written by Mike Marmer and Peter Gallay; both had received Emmy nominations for their comedy writing on *The Flip Wilson Show*, and became friends while working on the seventies classic. It was producer Louis "Deke" Hayward that approached his pal Marmer about scripting the specials that he was supervising for Hanna-Barbera; the writer accepted the offer and invited Peter Galley to join him as a writing partner on the project. They gave Hanna-Barbera exactly what they wanted: two variety comedy specials. Although they

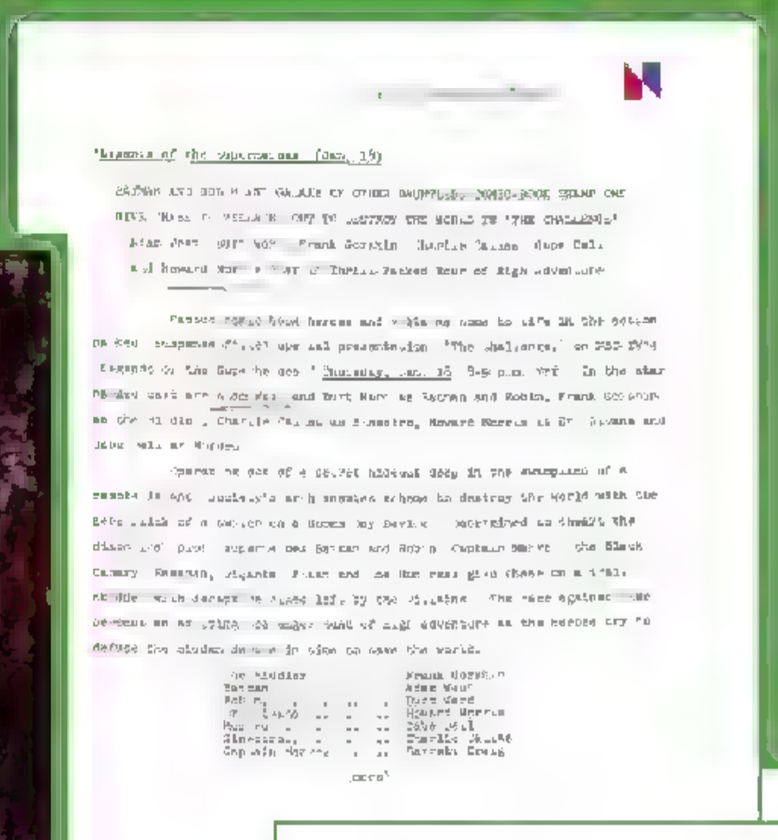
Summing up '70s suave, Howard Murphy portrayed a sure-of-himself Green Lantern.

Never one to refuse a call to duty, Batman and Robin (Adam West and Burt Ward) return to action over a decade later.

Actor Garrett Craig as Captain Marvel in *Legends of the Superheroes.*

Actress Barbara Joyce springs to action as The Huntress.

NBC press release for the airing of the first episode, *The Challenge.*



'Legends of the Superheroes' (Dec. 19)

CAPTAIN MARVEL AND BOY WONDER TO APPEAR ON ANOTHER SUPER-HERO SPECIAL ONE HOUR 'ROAST OF SUPERHEROES' SET TO AIRTIME THE WORLD IN 'THE CHALLENGE'

Adam West, Burt Ward, Frank Gorshin, Julie Newmar, Jack Cole and Howard Morris Star in Star-Packed Hour of High Adventure

Famous caped crime fighters and villains come to life in the action packed suspense drama and presentation 'The Challenge,' on CBS-TV's Legends of the Superheroes' Thursday, Dec. 19, 8-9 p.m. EST. In the star studded cast are Adam West and Burt Ward as Batman and Robin, Frank Gorshin as the Riddler, Charlie Callas as Penguin, Howard Morris as Dr. Stevens and Julie Newmar as Catwoman.

Opening on one of a series of hideout duels in the courtroom of a remote island, Batman's arch enemies scheme to destroy the world with the help of a device on a rocket by device. Determined to thwart the diabolical plot, superstars Adam Garrett and Burt Ward as Captain Marvel, the Black Canary, Aquaman, Atlanta, Robin and the real girl chase on a trail riddled with decoys and clues left by the villains. The race against time between an assortment of caped heroes and villains as the heroes try to defuse the sinister device in time to save the world.

The Riddler	Frank Gorshin
Batman	Adam West
Robin	Burt Ward
[illegible]	Howard Morris
Catwoman	Julie Newmar
Penguin	Charlie Callas

more

Legends of the Superheroes -2-

CAST, cont'd.

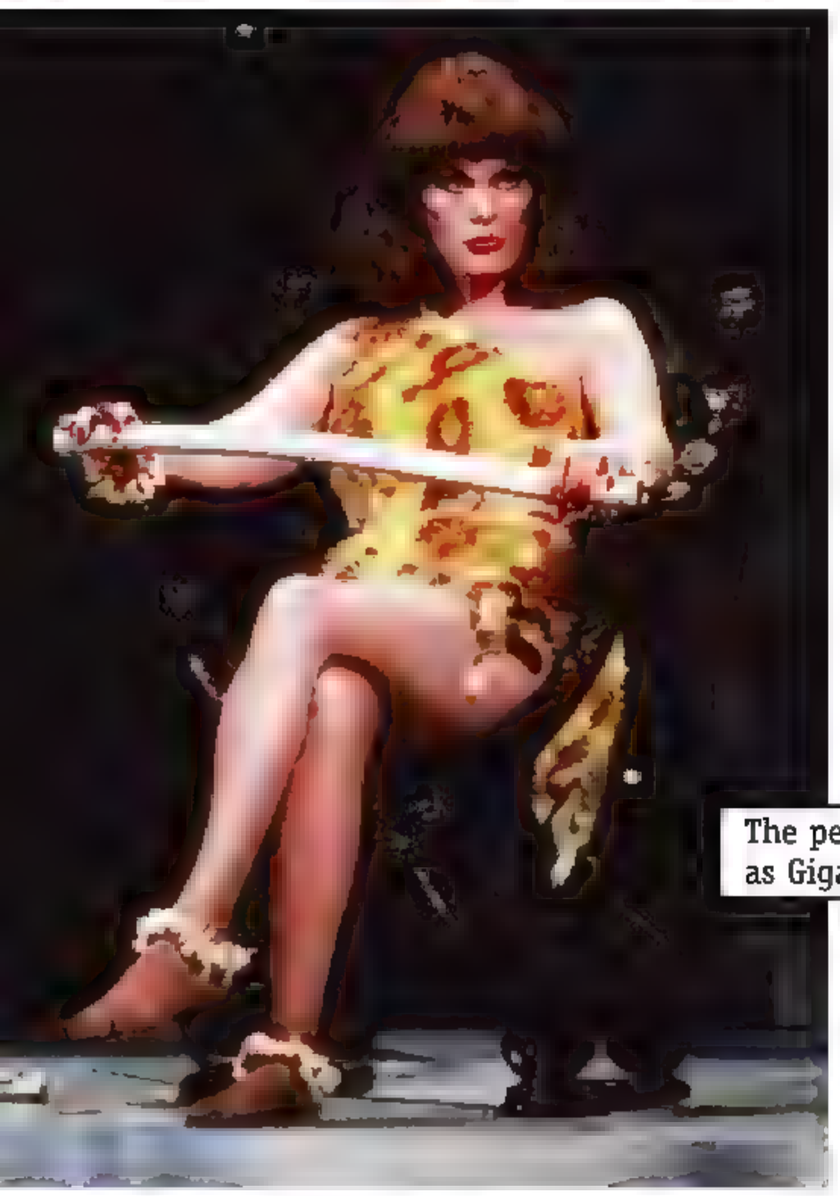
The Huntress	Barbara Joyce
Wonder Girl	Jeff Altman
Wonder Woman	Mickey Morton
Red Tornado	Michael S. Gilbert
Giganta	A'Leshia Brevard
Batman	Bill Nichols
Flash	Roy Weber
Black Canary	Sally J.

Producer: Bill Carruthers
Writers: Mike Marzo, Peter Gallay
Directors: Bill Carruthers, Chris Darley

NBC-TV PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT FAX, #8

LEGENDS OF THE SUPERHEROES "The Challenge" Leading comic book heroes come to life in a thrill-packed hour of high adventure as the crime fighters as Batman and Robin and Captain Marvel and their comrades join forces in a race against time to prevent society's arch enemies from destroying the world. Adam West, Burt Ward, Frank Gorshin, Howard Morris, Jack Cole and Charlie Callas head the star-packed cast.

NBC-New York 12/28/78



The perfectly cast A'leshia Brevard as Giganta.

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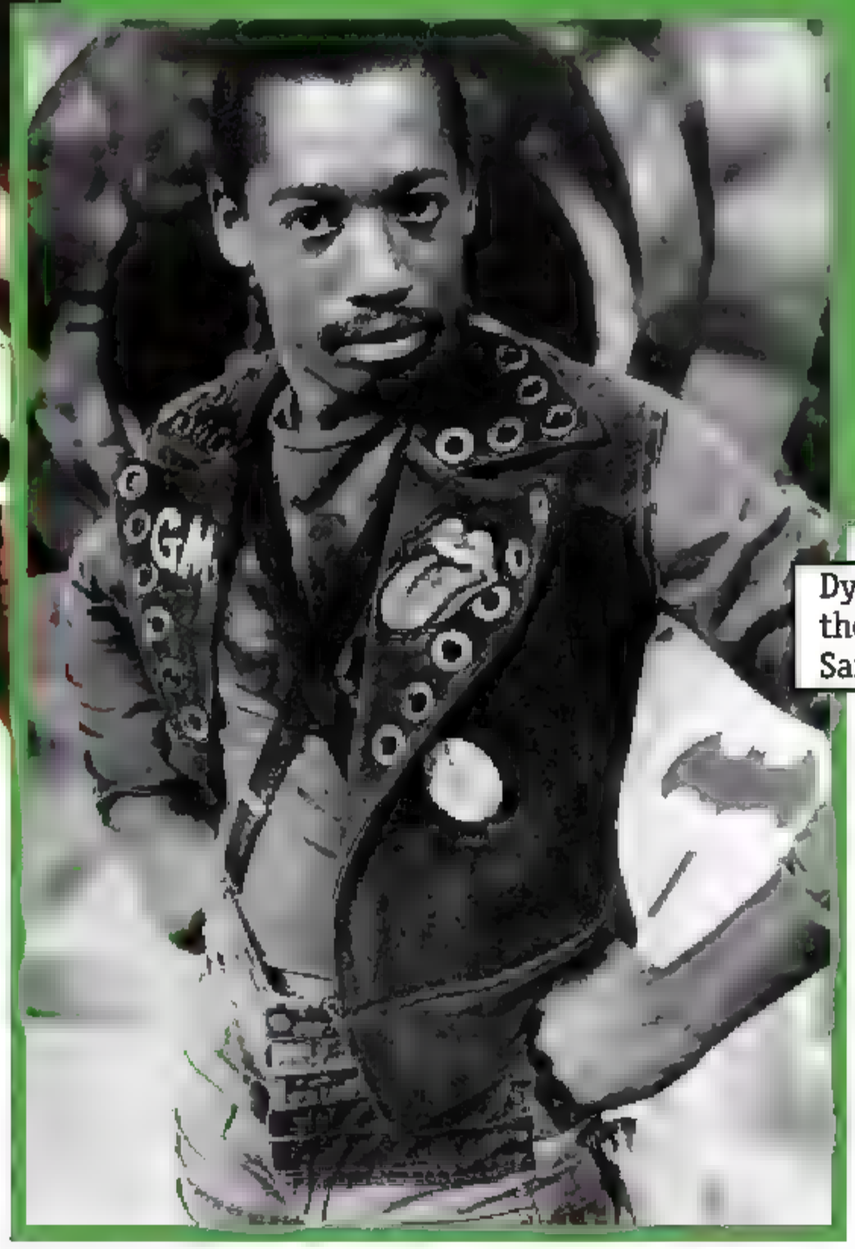
weren't comic book fans, they did their best to become acquainted with the essence of the characters in these hurried productions that were shot on videotape. Noticeably absent from the DC Heroes character line-up were Superman and Wonder Woman, as both character's rights were licensed to television and film endeavors.

"It was supposed to be silly and outrageous," stated writer Peter Gallay. "I'm not saying that nobody connected with the show took comics as seriously as certainly you or comics aficionados now do, or even then, and I guess there were two kind of separate audiences that eventually saw the show. You could divide the audience into two camps: One would be the people who really liked comics and were into comics and knew the characters, and, as you say, by and large they have fond memories of it. And then there's, the rest of them were, like, the general public and the critics, and they probably roundly hated the show down the line. Strangely enough, I, not knowing anything about comics and not being a comic fan, we wrote the show, we did the best we could, and I thought it was still pretty funny. I mean, to my mind it was a lot funnier on paper than in the actual execution, but I thought it was fairly successful for what we set out to do. Critics rapped it, as you know."

"The Challenge" is written and filmed with a bit of the feel of the sixties *Batman* tradition. In the show, we see the DC Heroes trying to stop a doomsday device from going off while battling the pesky DC villains. "The Roast" takes place in the heroes' headquarters, allowing it to be shot entirely on one set. The show is done in the style of *The Dean Martin Celebrity Roasts* of the seventies; the superheroes are roasted (and even serenaded) by their relatives, friends and villains. Heck, most of the comedy comes from the villains in the show, as they seemingly have all the funny lines (and also consist of seasoned performers). Oddly enough the Roast idea

Superheroes Black Canary (Danuta), Scarlet Cyclone, a.k.a. Retired Man (William Schallert) and The Huntress (Barbara Joyce).



Dynamite! Making his one and only appearance, the Windy City's superhero Ghetto Man (Brad Sanders) brought down the house with laughter.

came from Golden Age comics artist Sheldon Moldoff, from an idea pitch to Hanna-Barbera.

"Even though we wrote it for adults," said Gallay, "there's a level at which it worked for kids, because it was the superheroes and it was costumes and there was a lot of running around. And the jokes and the funny dialogue, the literal meanings of the words really wasn't important. Much the same as a little kid watching cartoons now. I have a three-year-old granddaughter and I watch her watch cartoons on TV, and I don't think she knows or cares about what's really going on. It's just the color and the movement. She's really not into the story very much. So I think this may have worked on that kind of level for kids, as well as adults appreciating, or hating, but at least understanding, what we were after."

Over a two-week period in late 1978, the shows were filmed by the team of actors and behind-the-scene players at ABC's hollywood studios; "Challenge" had some location shooting around Los Angeles in places like Calabasas, Puddingston and Bronson Canyon. Gallay added, "We all had our head in every aspect of it. And those people would have been [producer and director] Bill Carruthers and director Chris Darley. Not Deke Hayward—he was kind of the silent presence. He was the guy who worked for Hanna-Barbera, and once he got the ball rolling, he kind of left it to our own devices. But Bill Carruthers and Lee Gardino, who was the casting director, and Mike Marmer and I. And also, Joel Stein was the co-producer." The crew helped cast the show together as they became involved in every aspect of production: auditioning, shooting, and bringing it all together.

One of the things that make *Legends* stands out is how faithful the costumes are to the ones in the comics. The man responsible for those outfits was Warden Neil, one of the top costume designers in Hollywood. Neil said, "The pressure on me was more like getting the costumes authentic and correct and working right and looking like a superhero." Brought onboard by Bill Carruthers, Neil was given three weeks to design and complete the costumes. As a fan of comics, his goal was to make sure that the costumes were faithful to the comics themselves and within the budget that he was allotted. Due to the speed of the production and the low budget, the designer was on-set to ensure they were ready to go and fix anything that went wrong. Each costume was especially designed for its actor, and each likely was the only piece in wardrobe.

Galley recalled a humorous incident. "One of the things when we shot at the cave, that scene follows the meeting of all the superheroes, when they get together and they get the challenge. At the end of that scene, there's a shot where we only have, I've forgot, fifty minutes to find this doomsday device, 'Let's get going,' and they all run out of the cave. So you see them running out from the interior, and then we cut to the exterior, where they're all running out of the cave. My 11-year-old son, who was a comic book fan, I brought him with me to that shoot, because I thought he'd have a good time seeing it, which he did. And we're outside watching, and they shoot the scene where they all come running out of the cave, and the

For one brief moment of time, an incredibly buff Hawkman (Bill Nuckols), comic relief Ghetto Man (Brad Sanders) and debonair Captain Marvel (Garret Craig) shared the stage in "The Roast."

director said, 'It's wonderful, great. Cut! That's a wrap. Let's tear down the set, let's go.' And my son tugs on my shirt and said, 'Hey, Dad?' And I said, 'Yeah?' He said, 'Did you notice the Flash was the last one out of the cave?' *[laughter]* And it's true, he's the last one out of the cave."

One of the kids who watched the shows was this book's cover artist, Alex Ross, who said, "There are so many key things I remember from those shows that I enjoyed or just that stand out in my mind just because of how absurd they were, like this moment of Charlie Callas' Sinestro, which was an awesome casting by the way, of him masquerading as a psychiatrist, talking to Green Lantern when Hal should be about trying to find whatever the hell he was after at the given time, then stops in the middle of a park to sit down on a couch with a psychiatrist and talks a little about why is he wearing a mask. Stuff like that was just the most outrageous and crazy stuff. But one of the things I loved was that guy [actor Mickey Morton] that played Solomon Grundy, he seemed like he could work in any version of it that you would have wanted, like if it was a serious version, he looked like Solomon Grundy. He completely had the height and the face. He was a character actor, he did a lot of work back then, but he completely embodied that part, just like Howard Morris playing Sivana."

Remembering an encounter with a famous fan, Gallay told this final tidbit. "One day, I don't know, a few years later, I was working on the *Mary Tyler Moore Hour,* she had an hour variety show, and one of the writers across the hall was talking to a friend, and I kind of overheard this writer woman say, "Oh, yes, he's in the office right across from me. Hold on, I'll let you talk to him." She brought the phone over, and on the phone was Harlan Ellison. He wanted to talk to me because he knew I was on that show and I had written these two superhero specials. He praised those things to the skies. He thought they were the funniest and the campiest and we captured the true spirit of it, and he went on and on and on with his praise. And Harlan Ellison is a serious literary character, and I was kind of blown away that someone of his stature actually really liked it that much. So obviously he was in the comic fan category."

The biggest live-action superhero gathering ever! For two prime time specials, many DC characters made their live-action debuts. Seen here is a cast shot from the first episode, "The Challenge."

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The first actor to portray The Flash, Rod Haase pauses for the camera.

The incomparable Alex Toth created artwork for the *Legends of the Superheroes* casting call ad.

Steve Rogers as crimefighter Captain America, faces a severe test of his super-human abil ties when an arch criminal threatens the U S govern-ment with a drug which causes humans to age rapidly.

"Captain America" stars Reb Brown, Christopher Lee and Lana Wood as the wicked Yolanda.

Produced by Alan Sa.ter for Univer-sal Studios, Ivan Nagy directed from a script by Wilton Schi er and Patricia Payne and is based on the Marvel Comics ™ Character.

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Cap does it all! The main promotional image for the second *Captain America* telefilm.

chapter 8

CAPTAIN AMERICA

One of the earliest and most prominent superheroes, Joe Simon and Jack Kirby's Captain America was created as a symbol for worldwide freedom when he first appeared at the end of 1940 in his own, self-titled comic book. His main job was to defeat the threat posed by the Nazis and their Axis partners. The history of this hero starts with a youth named Steve Rogers, who is eager to do his part for America in the upcoming war effort. But his poor health precludes acceptance into standard military service. But because of his slim physique, he is tapped by a government agency that is developing a secret method to alter even the weakest man into a powerful fighting machine. After many trials, Rogers is accepted as the first test case for the treatments. But just as they are completed and Rogers has become the super soldier everyone was hoping for, the scientist who came up with the idea is killed by a traitor... and the secrets of his method apparently die with him. Rogers will be the only super soldier. With the addition of a disguise and shield, Captain America is born. He is immediately sent undercover to Europe on his first mission, to help the US and its allies rid the world of would-be oppressors.

The all-American Reb Brown was the perfect choice for ultimate good guy, Steve Rogers.

In 1978 at the height of comic book adaptations for television, Marvel had several series on the air or in development. So it was natural that Captain America, one of the company's most visible and successful heroes, should join the ranks of The Hulk, Spider-Man and Doctor Strange with a pilot. The initial project for Captain America came in the form of a TV movie, with the aim of creating a weekly series. Reaction to the pilot would determine if the character would see any further live-action adventures.

Like many other characters, Captain America's origins and motivations were changed for television. This Steve Rogers is an ex-Marine who is working as an artist. He was the son of a deceased soldier, a top crimefighter who was nicknamed "Captain America." During World War II, Rogers' father developed a serum called FLAG (Full Latent Ability Gain) that increased an individual's physique and mental abilities to their fullest potential. When criminals break into Steve's home hoping to find his father's FLAG secrets, they attack Rogers and leave

From the seventies, Marvel's Captain America character standard sheet. Art by John Romita.

Captain America's (Reb Brown) redesigned costume from the second telefilm.

him to die. Steve was found by military personnel, including Dr. Simon Mills (played by Len Birman). In order to save his life, they inject him with his father's FLAG formula. Rogers quickly recovers due to the formula and since he owes his life to it and his rescuers, he agrees to become the new Captain America. The Justice Department outfits him with a special uniform, shield and motorcycle, and a new Captain America is ready to take on all criminals.

Chosen to play the lead role was young actor Reb Brown. The all-American-looking star was handsome, charming and fit—all the attributes needed to play the stalwart Steve Rogers. Brown recalled his introduction to the role, "I remember I met [producer] Allan Balter over at Universal and we got along really well, and he just thought it would be a good fit." Although he wasn't told in advance what role he was, the process of getting it was extremely simple. "They selected me ahead of time," he said, "They kind of kept it under wraps. They said that they wanted to meet me for something and they didn't really tell me. Soon thereafter I found out that I got it." Producers for *Captain America* had seen Brown's work in earlier television action series like *The Six Million Dollar Man*, *The Rockford Files* and *CHiPs* and felt the actor's appearance and bearing would lend themselves perfectly to the role of Steve Rogers.

Of course, being a comic fan didn't hurt either. "I read all of that stuff," said Brown about the Captain America comics. "I mean, there was that, and of course the Hulk and Spider-Man. I love that stuff. If you ever looked at the original drawing of Captain America, he was 6'2", 220, which was basically what I was. A little bigger. *[laughs]*" So the surprise of being able to play Captain America in a TV film was a major thrill to Brown.

Production on the first film took seven weeks and was completed by late 1978. The script for *Captain America* was by veteran writer, Don Ingalls, who had written for nearly every major television Western through the fifties and sixties, as well as two episodes of *Star Trek*. The project was directed by Rod Holcomb, who had also helmed episodes of *The Six Million Dollar Man* and associate produced one episode of *Wonder Woman* in 1976 before it entered full season production. The telefilm was produced by Allan Balter, who also produced *Mission: Impossible*, *Shaft* and *The Six Million Dollar Man*. *Captain America* aired on January 19, 1979 on CBS, and public reaction to it was very positive.

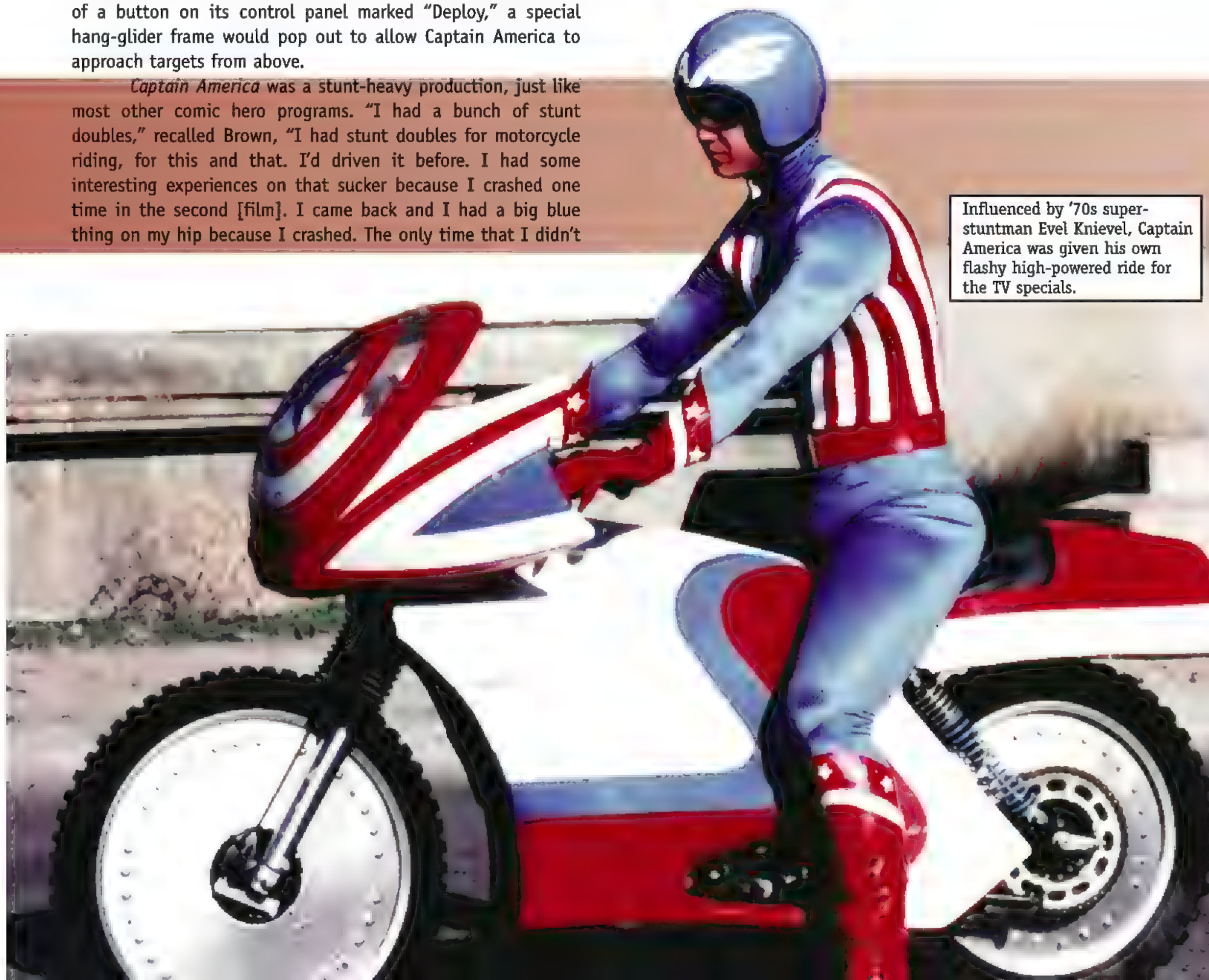
For many young viewers already familiar with the character, however, Captain America's TV costume was surprising. Sure it was red, white and blue, but its design was much different from its well known comic appearance. His famous shield was also different, being made of a piece of clear plastic. But at least the somewhat odd design choice for the shield had a secondary purpose—when Captain America rode his motorcycle, it could be mounted at the front to act as a windscreen.

The introduction of a motorcycle for Captain America cannot be overlooked as it was unique to the television version of the character. Along with its transport van, the motorcycle provided the Captain with a way to easily get around in the stories. But this angle was most likely given to the character to help capitalize on the incredible popularity of stuntman Evel Knievel. With his red, white and blue costume, Captain America could not only be a superhero, but would be able to wow viewers with motorcycle feats that rivaled Knievel's. Steve Rogers' special van could launch the cycle from its rear doors in an instant with an exciting puff of smoke. The motorcycle even had a special trick in its arsenal which allowed it to fly. At the touch of a button on its control panel marked "Deploy," a special hang-glider frame would pop out to allow Captain America to approach targets from above.

Captain America was a stunt-heavy production, just like most other comic hero programs. "I had a bunch of stunt doubles," recalled Brown, "I had stunt doubles for motorcycle riding, for this and that. I'd driven it before. I had some interesting experiences on that sucker because I crashed one time in the second [film]. I came back and I had a big blue thing on my hip because I crashed. The only time that I didn't have a stunt double is when I did all the fight stuff. The stuff when I jump from the motorcycle up to the helicopter? I did that. I remember that because all of the air went out of the airbags underneath, and I grabbed onto that helicopter like I tried to squeeze the blood out of it! They said, 'Reb, you kind of grabbed that awful tight.' And I said, 'I know! I was afeared!'"

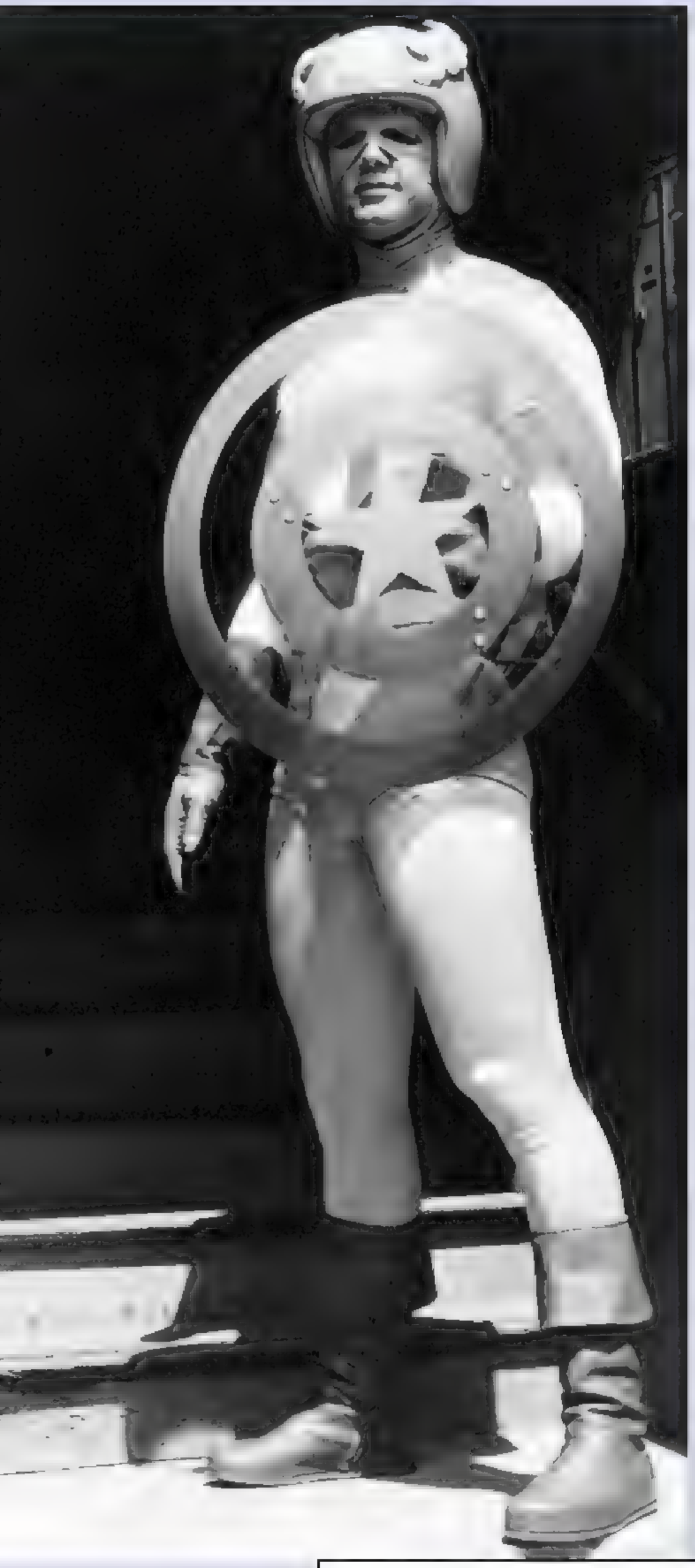
With the strong response to the first film, a second one was quickly put into production for mid-year 1978. Again, the production took seven weeks, and it was ready for airing on November 23rd of that year. For the second film, only Reb Brown and Lee Birman as Dr. Simon Mills returned. All of the secondary cast was changed out. Connie Sellecca was cast as Dr. Mills' assistant, Dr. Wendy Day, in one of her first TV roles. Hammer horror star Christopher Lee played the film's main villain, the terrorist, Miguel.

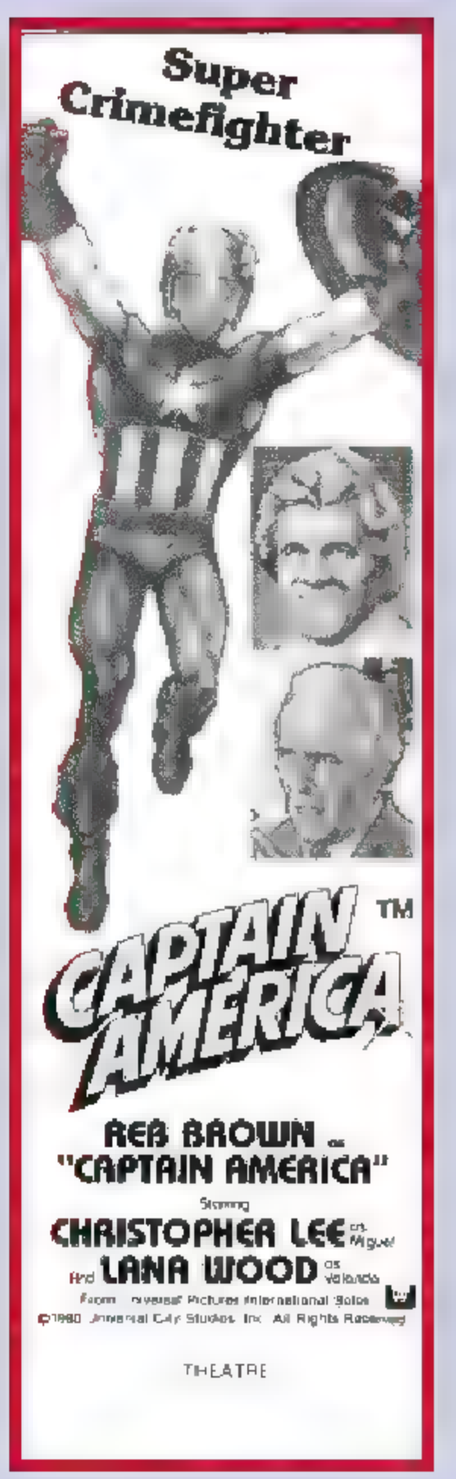
The second telefilm was co-written by Wilton Schiller, who had scripted episodes of *The Adventures of Superman*, *Dragnet* and *The Six Million Dollar Man*, along with Patricia Payne. It was directed by Ivan Nagy, who had previously worked on episodes of *Starsky and Hutch* and *CHiPs*. Allan Balter



Influenced by '70s super-stuntman Evel Knievel, Captain America was given his own flashy high-powered ride for the TV specials.

1979 Newspaper advertisement for the second *Captain America* special.





returned as producer—it would be one of the last productions he worked on before his untimely death in 1981.

Brown described his experience on the second telefilm. "There was a year in between. In fact, the second one was right after I got married. They started filming the following week. The second one was [more fun] because I just felt more comfortable, more in control and knowing exactly what I was doing. I had more fun in the script. In the first one, [I was] nervous. The second one, you kind of know who the hell you are. They gave us a little bit more free rein, and they let me go a little bit further and have more fun."

Captain America's costume was updated for the second film, and it more accurately portrayed the one comic fans knew. Brown explained, "Because Marvel Comics complained, we had to make it a different way. They had to conform to the Captain America character. That's why they had to put the wings on the helmet in the second one. They had the cowl on me, which the character wore, but I couldn't do that and ride a motorcycle. There were no wingtips underneath it, it was a cowl. The reason he [was] in the helmet was because he couldn't really take it off and run around with it. Another thing is that it helped with the disguise."

While both of the telefilms scored well with viewers, *Captain America* never made it to weekly series status. The potential for follow-up films and projects was great, but the opportunity disappeared. Reb Brown explained why. "The ratings were exceptionally good for the first one, but the second one wasn't as good. I remember that as a matter of fact. CBS liked it enough they wanted to buy it, but they lost the rights to it. What happened is, we were supposed to be a series. CBS bought it for, I think it was going to be twelve episodes, but Universal lost the licensing fee to Marvel Comics. At the time they were paying 2,500 bucks per episode. Some attorney over at Universal didn't do due diligence and take care of it in the proper timing and [then] they wanted fifty grand an episode—

Since 1940, Captain America has stood as a symbol for honor and courage in the United States.

Captain America's clear shield struck many kids as an odd choice for the films, but it was practical as it doubled for the windscreen on his motorcycle.

and that nixed the deal, so we couldn't do it. They didn't have enough funds to be able to pay that fifty grand for the Captain America licensing fee."

The reluctance to pick up *Captain America* could also have been due simply to timing. The second production aired during the time when CBS was axing most of its hero shows, high ratings or not—*Spider-Man* ended in July, *Wonder Woman* in September and, finally, *Captain America* in November. It was the last of CBS' experimentation with primetime superhero programming until 1990 with *The Flash*. As with *Spider-Man*, both of the *Captain America* films were offered as theatrical features for international distribution by Universal Pictures, where the second film was retitled *Captain America II: Death Too Soon*.

When Captain America (Reb Brown) throws his mighty shield, all those who choose to oppose his shield must yield.

Brown sums up his time as one of Marvel's greatest heroes, "Of course you're going to be typecast a little bit and you're going to get teased a little bit. I used to laugh with some of the guys, I'd say, 'Well, after you've been a superhero, it's all downhill.' I just figured, y'know, this is me, this is what I did, I'm going to go out and be a hero. I'm glad I got to play it. It's fun doing something that you can look back on and laugh about it and have a good time, because how many people get to play a superhero?"

Actress Jessica Walters reveled in her performance as evil temptress, Morgan LeFay.

'70s stylized end credits artwork of Peter Hooten as Doctor Strange.

Magic and Mayhem! All in a day's work for Dr. Stephen Strange (Peter Hooten) and his mentor, Thomas Lindmer (Sir John Mills).

chapter 9

DOCTOR STRANGE

Like Spider-Man, Dr. Strange, The Sorcerer Supreme of the Marvel Universe, sprung to life from the imagination of Stan Lee and Steve Ditko in 1963. Along the way, the debonair character has regularly entertained readers while defending the earth from all things mystical and supernatural. By 1978, Stephen Strange made the natural transition to the tube when the television films of *Spider-Man* and *The Incredible Hulk* drew sensational Nielsen ratings for the CBS network.

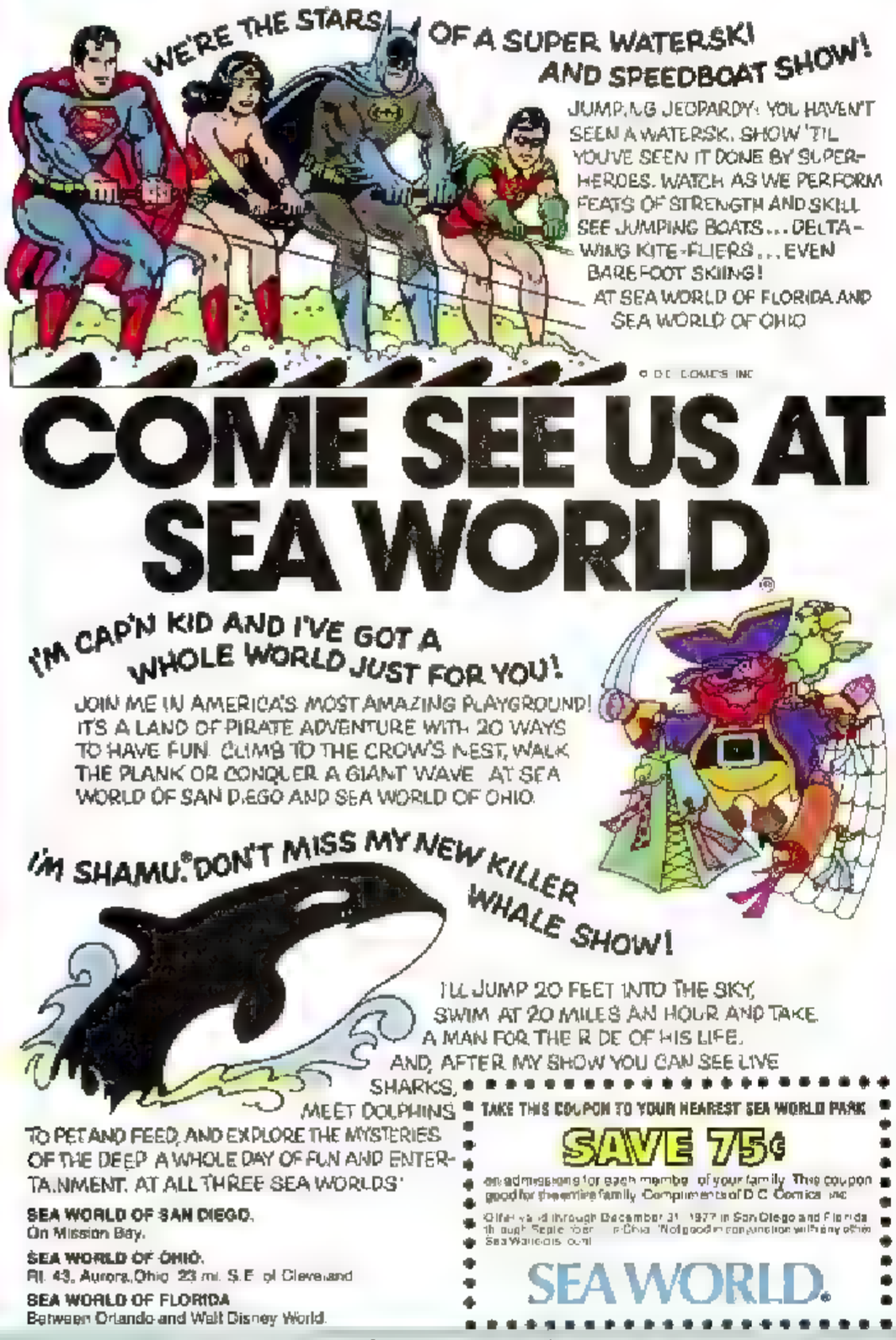
Exploring the intriguing occult superhero on the small screen, Universal recruited an upcoming filmmaker named Philip DeGuere (later a popular writer and producer on shows like *JAG*, *Max Headroom* and his own creation *Simon & Simon*) to oversee the entire production as the writer, director and executive producer. Heavily influenced by the comics and the original *Star Wars* film, the late DeGuere wanted to tell a tale of a world where there are people who are agents of dark forces and others who are agents of good forces that bring about the events that unfold in our lives. In his script, Doctor Strange is an advocate of good who learns to use his cosmic mystic abilities to help those ordinary people victimized by evil.

Veteran actor Peter Hooten earned the titular role over several actors that DeGuere wanted to test—including John Wayne's son Patrick, star of *Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger*. Peter cleverly portrayed the part with a sly self-confidence that made viewers believe that he was a romantic playboy, a superb physician and a budding mystic. "It was great fun," said Hooten about the production. "And [Phil] was just so affable and fun-loving and just a very fine producer and director. You didn't feel that there was any stress on the sets or anything to do with producers looking over his shoulder and telling him how it ought better run. And he really loved what he was doing."

Rounding out the cast were character actor Clyde Kusatsu as the faithful Wong, Michael Crichton's ex-wife Anne Marie Martin as the love interest Clea, actress Jessica Walters (of *Play Misty for Me* and *Arrested Development* fame) as the witchy and venomous Morgana LeFey and the great Sir John Mills as Thomas Lindmer, the mentor of Dr. Strange. The character of Lindmer was an amalgam of the Marvel's comic book mentor, the Ancient One, and *Star Wars*' Ben Kenobi, that was solely developed for the project. Ever the performer, Sir John tackled the role with dashing gusto that gave the production the credibility that it needed.

On September 5th of 1978, CBS aired the completed two-hour film against a broadcast of an installment of ABC's original mini-series phenomenon, *Roots*. Few viewers tuned in to see *Doctor Strange*. The network scrapped plans for a second installment that would have seen the hero placed in a cosmic struggle for the fate of the Earth. Any hope for a series was washed away once the network suits saw the Nielsen ratings.

Despite the ratings, Phil DeGuere really managed to produce a grand Dr. Strange film on a modest budget, with solid special effects and nice production value for television. More importantly, Strange proved to be a very sexy and [illegible] nature superhero [illegible] that was [illegible] and directed because the filmmaker made the effort to keep very true to the source material.


WE'RE THE STARS OF A SUPER WATERSKI AND SPEEDBOAT SHOW!
JUMPING JEOPARDY! YOU HAVEN'T SEEN A WATERSKI SHOW 'TIL YOU'VE SEEN IT DONE BY SUPER-HEROES. WATCH AS WE PERFORM FEATS OF STRENGTH AND SKILL SEE JUMPING BOATS... DELTA-WING KITE-FLIERS... EVEN BAREFOOT SKIING! AT SEA WORLD OF FLORIDA AND SEA WORLD OF OHIO
© D.C. COMICS INC
COME SEE US AT SEA WORLD®
I'M CAP'N KID AND I'VE GOT A WHOLE WORLD JUST FOR YOU!
JOIN ME IN AMERICA'S MOST AMAZING PLAYGROUND! IT'S A LAND OF PIRATE ADVENTURE WITH 20 WAYS TO HAVE FUN. CLIMB TO THE CROW'S NEST, WALK THE PLANK OR CONQUER A GIANT WAVE. AT SEA WORLD OF SAN DIEGO AND SEA WORLD OF OHIO.
I'M SHAMU. DON'T MISS MY NEW KILLER WHALE SHOW!
I'LL JUMP 20 FEET INTO THE SKY, SWIM AT 20 MILES AN HOUR AND TAKE A MAN FOR THE RIDE OF HIS LIFE. AND, AFTER MY SHOW YOU CAN SEE LIVE SHARKS, MEET DOLPHINS TO PET AND FEED, AND EXPLORE THE MYSTERIES OF THE DEEP. A WHOLE DAY OF FUN AND ENTERTAINMENT. AT ALL THREE SEA WORLDS!
SEA WORLD OF SAN DIEGO. On Mission Bay.
SEA WORLD OF OHIO. Rt. 43, Aurora, Ohio. 23 mi. S.E. of Cleveland
SEA WORLD OF FLORIDA Between Orlando and Walt Disney World.
TAKE THIS COUPON TO YOUR NEAREST SEA WORLD PARK
SAVE 75¢
on admissions for each member of your family. This coupon good for theentire family. Compliments of D.C. Comics Inc.
Offer valid through December 31, 1977 in San Diego and Florida through September 30, 1977 in Ohio. Not good in conjunction with any other Sea World discount.
SEA WORLD.

This ad prepared kids for the times of their lives, getting to see their heroes and heroines live and in person!

A Water Cavalcade of the Comics

A cold spring morning in 1976 at Lake Geauga, Ohio saw a group of soaked-to-the-bone performers ready themselves for another dip into the recently-thawed water. After two months of training, they took their last run throughs before opening a new stunt/ski show at Sea World Aurora. All had to be ready before the Memorial Day weekend, when families and fun-seekers would flood the park for the Summer season. Rehearsals were frequent and lengthy as a show of this type had never before been attempted.

Every year or two the parks would develop a new summer water ski show, but their offering for 1976 was more involved, with more spectacular stunts and performers. Custom-made props and sets were created for the acts, as well as customized vehicles and, in an even more unusual twist, magic acts. As if this wasn't enough, the presentation would be the very first licensed theme show Sea World had undertaken.

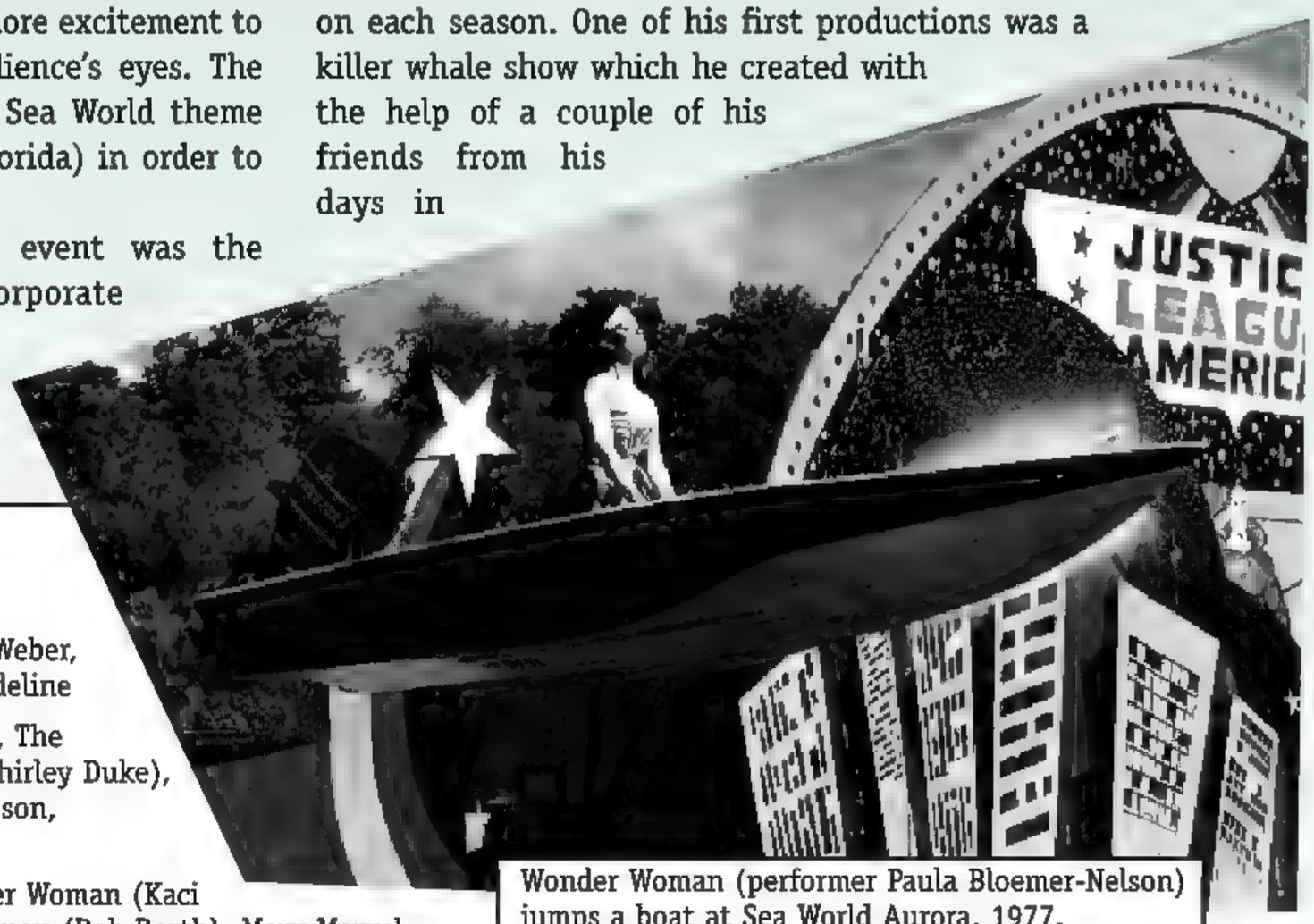
A rough sketch by comic artist Dick Giordano for the Sea World ad.

TWO:

A SALUTE TO THE SUPER HEROES

The ambitious task was named *A Salute to the Super Heroes*. Starting earlier that year, kids were teased with months of "Come see us at Sea World" ads on the backs of DC comics. The full-color drawing of a grinning Superman, Wonder Woman, Batman and Robin on water skis promised speedboats, jumping, delta kite-flying and more excitement to be had. All, of course, live before the audience's eyes. The major catch was that you had to visit the Sea World theme park in Aurora, Ohio (and later, Orlando, Florida) in order to enjoy the show.

The *Salute to the Super Heroes* event was the brainchild of Sea World's head of Corporate Entertainment, Bob La Porta. The Sea World boss came from a television background where he worked on programs like *The Mike Douglas Show* and *The Merv Griffin Show*. He left television in 1969 to bring his family to San Diego when he got the position of overseeing Sea World's events. As the head of their entertainment division, it was La Porta's duty to come up with the attractions and main shows that Sea World would put on each season. One of his first productions was a killer whale show which he created with the help of a couple of his friends from his days in



Wonder Woman (performer Paula Bloemer-Nelson) jumps a boat at Sea World Aurora, 1977.

TOP: The 1976 cast from Aurora Ohio.

Front row left to right: Assistant Manager - Tom Weber, Lead - Andy Hansen, Supervisor - Linda Moffet, Jimmy Olsen/Master of Ceremony (Tom Stuart), Lead - Karen Weber, Boat Driver - Sharkey Schwartz, Boat Driver - Dave Madeline

Second row left to right: The Penguin (Mark Gutleben), The Joker/Master of Ceremony (Ken McCabe), Catwoman (Shirley Duke), The Riddler (Kerry Lloyd), Show Manager - Gary Thompson, Elephant Trainer & Tarzan (Dave Blasko)

Third row left to right: Amazon (Reyna Mullen), Wonder Woman (Kaci Hedstrom), Queen Hippolyta (Annette Hoffman), Aquaman (Bob Borth), Mary Marvel (Sherry Wickstrom), Captain Marvel (Randy Jones), Supergirl (Valaree Morris), Superman (Steve Fontaine), The Flash (John MacQueen), Black Canary (Debbie Bearndt), Batman (Roger Hansen), Batgirl (Sheri McNary), Robin (Allen Kelley), Green Arrow (Brad Whitmore)

Last Row: Assistant Elephant Trainer - Kenny (last name unknown), Sunja the Elephant

television—the writing team of Dan Kibbie and Ken Johnson. Interestingly, this Ken Johnson was the very same individual who later went on to great television success with *The Bionic Woman*, *The Incredible Hulk*, *V* and many other programs.

Since their initial collaboration went so well, La Porta continued to work with Kibbie and Johnson to come up with additional main attraction ideas over the years. Most water ski shows up to this point in time were spectacle type affairs that featured teams of skiers with specific talents. La Porta wanted something more, something to catch audiences' eyes. The trio developed Sea World's first themed water ski show in 1973 called *The Roaring '20s Water Frolics*. The show changed the way water ski events would be presented at Sea World. Not only was it a huge hit with attendees, but Sea World founder George Millay loved it. The show ran for two seasons until it was time to look into creating another new main attraction.

Since the theme idea was such a hit, there was no question that another show of that type would be put on. So what to do? The answer came from Bob La Porta's own young sons. La Porta re-membered, "We had three children, two boys that were very involved with superheroes—on television primarily and some comic books. They were collectors and their mother would take them to early comic book conventions that took place in San Diego, and they were very excited about both Marvel and DC characters." Watching his boys' reactions to the heroes on television made La Porta realize the impact comic characters could generate, so he took his thought to the Sea World board. "I remember presenting it to the executives at Sea World and they were somewhat skeptical," La Porta said. "I mean they certainly knew comic books and what they represented in society and their potential. But I don't think it had really grown to be the social phenomenon that it is today." Even though the executives weren't totally sold on the idea yet, they allowed La Porta to explore it.

La Porta first approached Marvel Comics, but they were unsure of the appeal and the two parties were never able to put a deal together. That certainly didn't help in the eyes of his bosses, but La Porta continued on and contacted DC Comics next. They saw the exposure it could give their characters and name, but even they took a bit of convincing. But La Porta's persistence and eagerness eventually paid off when DC decided to allow Sea World to use their characters. "DC gave us a four-year license agreement," La Porta explained, "I had a hard sell, I remember that. It was not an easy sell, but once I got DC Comics, then I think they knew we had potential here." Once DC agreed to the concept, the executives at Sea World quickly got on board as well.

With the deal in place, it came down to putting the show together. One of the first hurdles the producers tackled was just which characters were going to be involved in the show. DC provided an open book, placing no restrictions on which, or how many, characters could be included. Some, like Aquaman were naturals, but a gamut of others from Batman and Robin, to Superman, Wonder Woman, Supergirl, The Green Arrow, Black Canary and The Flash were included. Of course, no show would be complete without the bad guys. The producers once again packed the cast by including The Joker, The Riddler, Catwoman, The Penguin and The Flash's perennial enemy, Captain Cold. Even non-hero characters like Clark Kent, Lois Lane and Jimmy Olsen got in on the act.

The cast was massive and required a lot of custom costumes that, from a production standpoint at least, were going to be the most important parts of the whole event. Not only did they have to look right, they had to be functional, durable and safe for the performers. Initially, the Ice Capades organization

Sea World Aurora, 1976 Pyramid formation.
Top: Wonder Woman (Kaci Hedstrom)
Middle row left to right: Batgirl (Debbie Berndt), Supergirl (Valaree Morris), Black Canary (Sherry Wickstrom), Mary Marvel (Reyna Mullen)
Bottom L-R: Robin (Allen Kelley), Batman (Roger Hansen), Superman (Andy Hansen), Aquaman (Bob Borth), Captain Marvel (Steve Fontaine)

Performer Bob Borth in plain clothes (left) and in the Aquaman costume (right) having fun in reheasals at Sea World Orlando, 1977.

was contacted to design the costumes, but due to expense and their designers not quite getting the requirements of costumes for heavy water use, they couldn't develop what Sea World needed. Instead, veteran film and Las Vegas show costume designer Lloyd Lambert got the task of designing and creating the outfits. His final costumes, which cost Sea World an astounding $40,000, were reminiscent of the popular *World's Greatest Super-Heroes!* line of toys from Mego.

The costumes were made of the relatively new material Spandex, which was colorful, lightweight and provided the long-lasting strength the performers needed. Plus it looked great at a distance—the colors stood out for the audience so it was always clear who was performing. One thing observant fans would have noticed was that most of costumes did not have complete boots or gloves. This was done for safety issues as well as being practical. The lack of full boot and glove coverings made it effortless for performers to slip in and out of water skis and other devices they used during the program. The costumes' "boots" were actually nothing more than colored pieces of Spandex that went down to about ankle-length, at which point a flesh-colored stirrup was attached that would slip under the performers' otherwise bare feet. The gloves were much the same, ending at the performers' wrists, with a thin flesh-colored strip that went through their fingers.

The cast tried out padded wetsuits under their costumes in the beginning. Performer Tom Weber was about twenty-three at the time of the *Salute* show, where he typically appeared as Aquaman. Weber was a part of the show from the beginning and remembers the first awkward wetsuits. "The very first time through we had shoulder padding, chest padding, thigh padding and quadriceps padding in a wetsuit that we wore. The intention was to wear it all the time to really get bulked up. Those wetsuits were extremely restrictive and everybody in the show was in really, pretty good shape, so it ended up not being necessary. And the look was better without them than it was with them."

Performer Valaree Morris had just turned eighteen at the time of the *Salute* show's premiere, but she was a major part of the cast as Supergirl. She also played Catwoman, Batgirl, Mary Marvel and Lois Lane as needed. She explained not all of the padding went away. "The gals had a 'weigh day' once a week and we had to be one hundred twelve pounds or under. Since we were fairly small gals, we had to wear padded bras so we would have 'Super Boobs' *[laughs]* and look like the comic characters we were portraying." So some of the padding stayed for the women, but the restrictive portions of it were done away with. By themselves, the wetsuits were light and

Superman (Steve Fontaine), Aquaman (Bob Borth) and The Flash (John MacQueen) rehearse in Orlando, Florida, 1977.

didn't pose a problem for movement, so they stayed for protection against the cold water.

The hero costumes would slip on over top of the thin wetsuits. It was important that some of the performers were able to layer a few costumes on top of one another. That way they could come out as one character, then slip behind a set piece, strip the outer layer off and step out as another character in a matter of seconds. Performer Tom Weber explained, "If there was a difficulty with the show it was that those costumes were impossible to put on once you were wet. So if you had to change from a superhero into something else in the show, even temporarily, you had to overdress. You'd start out with three costumes on and then you'd just start peeling as the show went on. You felt like a three-year-old going out in the snow up north, where you really couldn't move. If there was a downside to being a superhero, that was it, and it was minor compared to the benefits."

"There were constant challenges when it came to skiing in costume," added Morris. "Sometimes a cape would get tangled around a rope or would fly across your face and blind you, especially during lifts. When climbing the pyramid, it was easy to slip on the costume material of the guy's thigh that you were climbing up on."

"We had to adhere to strict DC Comics regulations," she continued. "For example, I have brown hair, but when I played Supergirl, I was required to wear a blonde wig. Our wigs had an elastic chin strap. It didn't happen often, but if you fell hard the wig would sometimes be hanging off the back of your neck. This of course seemed to happen at a night show—when it was mandatory to shine a spotlight on you until you were picked up by a boat. We also had to wear a ton of make-up. It would run if you got rained on or fell. It smeared easily, too."

When the show premiered, everything started out wonderfully but unraveled quickly with the costuming.

Looking like live Mego dolls, Batgirl (Sheri McNary), Batman (Roger Hansen) and Robin (Allen Kelley) having fun at Sea World, Aurora, 1976 (note the boot and glove ends on Batman and Robin).

La Porta described, "We were beginning to detect a very serious problem. In the industrial dryers for the costumes, the fabric began to break down. While they looked great opening day, opening week, they began to disintegrate before our eyes. The rubberized thread in the fabric would snap and run to the seams. At all the seams there was this hairy product that was actually rubber. They were unusable, they were just turning into limp dishrags. This was like three weeks into the run. We had to re-order many, many pieces. So much so that when we designed the waterski theater in Orlando, instead of dryers, we had dry rooms. A major room devoted to the washing and drying of these superhero costumes."

The Joker and The Penguin team up for mayhem in Sea World Orlando's Atlantis Theater, 1977.

Orlando, 1977. *Top:* Wonder Woman (Sheri Wickstrom)
Middle left to right: Batgirl (Shirley Duke), Black Canary (Debbie Bearndt), Mera (Kaci Hedstrom), Supergirl (Mary Beth Madeline McMurtrie)
Bottom left to right: Batman (Roger Hansen), Robin (Allan Kelley), Green Lantern (Randy Messer), Aquaman (Bob Borth), and Superman (Steve Fontaine)

The show's plot, as written by Dan Kibbie, centered around the "Gotham-Metropolis Water Games" in which a friendly competition between the heroes kept getting disrupted by the bad guys. After each major stuntpiece, a story break would come in where one of the bad guys would kidnap someone, or steal something important to the heroes that required them to leap into action.

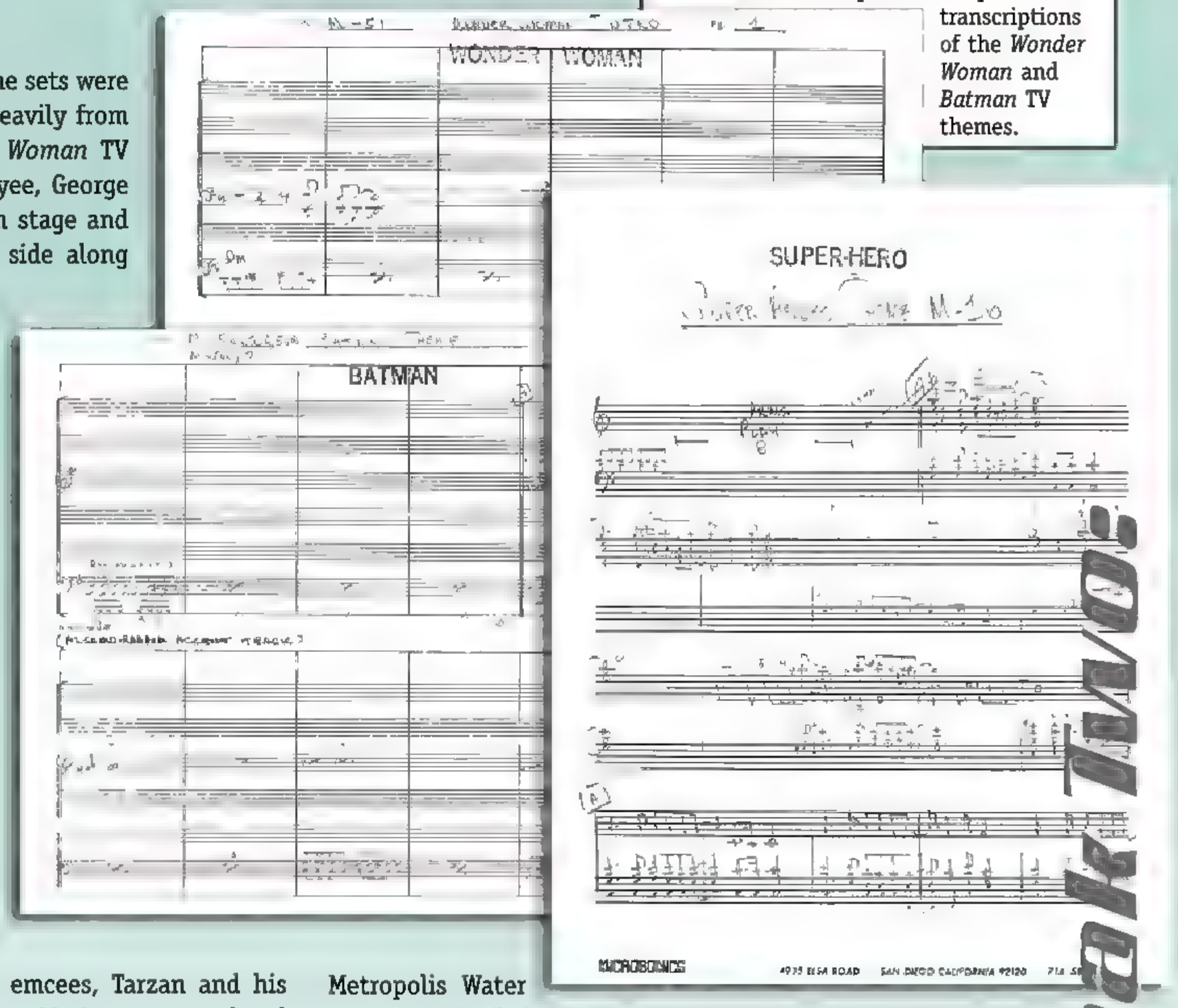
Catwoman (Shirley Duke) strolls across the main stage in Ohio, 1976.

The entire event was performed to pre-recorded tracks that included the narration, music and singing that was synced to the cast's actions. The music was created by composer Clark Gault, who had begun working for Sea World in 1975. Gault remembered, "At the time, I was writing all the live music for the parks. I did killer whale shows, dolphin shows, underwater swimmer shows, then the water fantasy show. That was the only [water ski] one that I had a part of." To give some familiarity, Gault adapted the existing themes from the *Adventures of Superman*, *Batman*, *Shazam!* and *Wonder Woman* series—the only four live-action DC characters to have TV themes at that point—as well as creating a number of his own cues for the program.

The recordings were played on a system that allowed for variance in the live performances, Gault explained, "They used cartridges, sort of like eight-track cartridges, the kind they used in radio stations. There'd be a little slot; as soon as you push it in, it starts playing and there'd be ways to pick which track you wanted to play. I wrote an intro, then there was a loop and a little something to get out of it. Most of my music was for animals; they know animals are pretty much going to do what they want, but they don't know how quickly. The music would start, go into a loop and they would just keep looping around a short part of the music until the animal did what it was supposed to do and then they would push the button for the little chord to end it. All the music was that way. Typically for the water ski show it would have been a little more predictable, but they would have done it exactly the same way. You actually had an operator back there running the music for every show. So it was a little unusual. It'd be a lot easier nowadays with a CD player *[laughs]*."

Lyrics and dialogue were recorded and played back separately from Gault's score and were used in the show in the same manner as the music. Valaree Morris remembered a small amount of the song the heroes sang at the opening portion of the show, she described, "[We would] land on the beach and sing/dance with hands on hips for a Super-Hero Pose to something like:

[illegible]



Composer Clark Gault's original music score for *Salute to the Super Heroes* plus his transcriptions of the *Wonder Woman* and *Batman* TV themes.

Major thematic elements for the sets were adapted from comic titles, but also heavily from the *Batman*, *Superman* and *Wonder Woman* TV series. Designed by Sea World employee, George Yochum, the sets consisted of a main stage and two smaller side pieces off to each side along with two jump ramps in front of the main stage. All of this was anchored out a short distance into the lake. The stage and ramps were dark and made to look somewhat like the skyline of Gotham City. Some versions included the words "Justice League of America" painted at the top of the main set piece, while the side stages included the Bat Signal and a *Daily Planet* sign painted to look like neon. The two jump ramps in front of the main stage included cartoon accents like the words "Biff" and "Sok" as seen in the *Batman* TV show. There were also plenty of streaking stars around the set as seen in the beginning credits of *Wonder Woman*. The shore had a small stage as well, to present other portions of the show, including the emcees, Tarzan and his elephant Sunja, and magic acts. Mercury Marine sponsored and promoted the event by providing all of the boats and other water vehicles used in the show. One boat was specially modified for Batman; called the "Batcraft" in this event, it was given a blue/purple metallic flake paint job and had fins and other visual elements added to it.

The magic portions of the show were devised by Harry Blackstone, Jr., and carried out by the superhero performers. "The magician, Harry Blackstone, Jr., taught me how to be cut in half and also how to disappear!" remembered Morris, "We had to take 'The Magician's Oath' and not tell anyone how the tricks were done. [He] taught us three magic tricks for the show, one for the guys and two for the gals. The tricks were Robin escaping a bed of steel spikes, cutting Supergirl and Mary Marvel in half [and] Catwoman disappearing from a kiosk [on the beach] after trying to steal the Gotham-Metropolis Water Games Trophy." The steel spikes illusion was a trap devised by The Joker, where he trapped Robin, and was dubbed the "Cheese Press." Sometimes the illusion of sawing a woman in half was done with Supergirl and Wonder Woman.

The performers had to learn the tricks in addition to their other stunts in the program. While the *Salute* show didn't develop any new techniques, it was a very involved show that pulled out all the stops to include as many feats as possible, including slaloms, barefoot skiing, ski and boat jumping, boat racing, a sequence where Sunja the elephant skied, pulling a member of the audience out for a once-in-a-lifetime ride along with Batman and Robin in the Batcraft, ski pyramids with ten characters, pyrotechnics and a delta kite finale. All this and more happened in a quick, forty-five minute run time, with between three to eight shows daily. It was a rigorous schedule.

Batman (Roger Hansen) and Robin (Allen Kelley) between performances in Orlando, 1977.

The final delta kite sequence was one of the few times DC stepped in with some direction. The stunt consisted of a character towed into the air on a giant kite, then released so he could safely glide to center stage. The initial thought was to have Superman fly the kite, but DC did not want that. Their

Boat driver Dave Madeline dons the Penguin costume for a special charity performance, in Sea World Orlando, 1977.

The Joker (Ken McCabe) poses for a photo at Sea World Aurora, 1976.

Roger Hansen and Allen Kelley clowning around for the camera in Orlando, 1977.

A lucky fan gets a ride with Batman in the Batcraft, at Sea World Ohio, 1976.

contention—as any kid would have quickly pointed out—was that Superman didn't need a kite to fly. So, it was agreed that The Flash would be on the delta kite. For safety reasons, the performer appearing as The Flash did not wear his mask while performing the final stunt.

After each performance, a few of the cast would go down to the stadium exit in their costumes to have pictures taken with kids and sign programs. It was a very popular show that pulled in a lot of visitors. Bob La Porta recalled, "In those days, the Sea World attendee would go to all the shows. I used

The hero cast of Sea World Orlando, 1977.
Batman (Roger Hansen) and Robin (Allen Kelley) in boat
On ramp, left to right: Green Lantern (Randy Messer), Wonder Woman (Sheri Wickstrom), Aquaman (Bob Borth), Black Canary (Debbie Bearndt), Batgirl (Shirley Duke), Mera (Kaci Hedstrom), Supergirl (Mary Beth Madeline McMurtrie), and Superman (Steve Fontaine)

to rank all of the shows and take surveys and rate [them]. That was considered a major show. Ohio only had a Shamu stadium, a sea lion stadium and the waterski show. So three stadiums. Anyone who paid to get in would not miss any one of those. It was extremely well attended."

These days, seeing themed superhero extravaganzas is nothing out of the ordinary. But Sea World's pioneering *A Salute to the Super Heroes* show started the trend. They had no existing models from which to work or develop the show, it was all by the seat of their pants. Bob La Porta added, "A lot of what we did at Sea World was like that. We were inventing the wheel so many times with new shows and new ideas and that certainly was one of them." Its success allowed the show to be further developed for the Orlando, Florida Sea World park later in 1976, where it was the first water ski show to be performed at the park's newly-built, 5,000-seat Atlantis Theater. It was not performed at their San Diego location due to a lack of performance space.

While the show was very popular during its run, producers only took advantage of two years of their four-year contract with DC. For the 1978 season *A Salute to the Super Heroes* was replaced by a comedic water ski event called *Almost Anything Goes*. This new show was adapted from the ABC TV game show of the same name. The replacement was due more to Sea World wanting something fresh to attract the public than it was to the *Salute* show losing any of its steam.

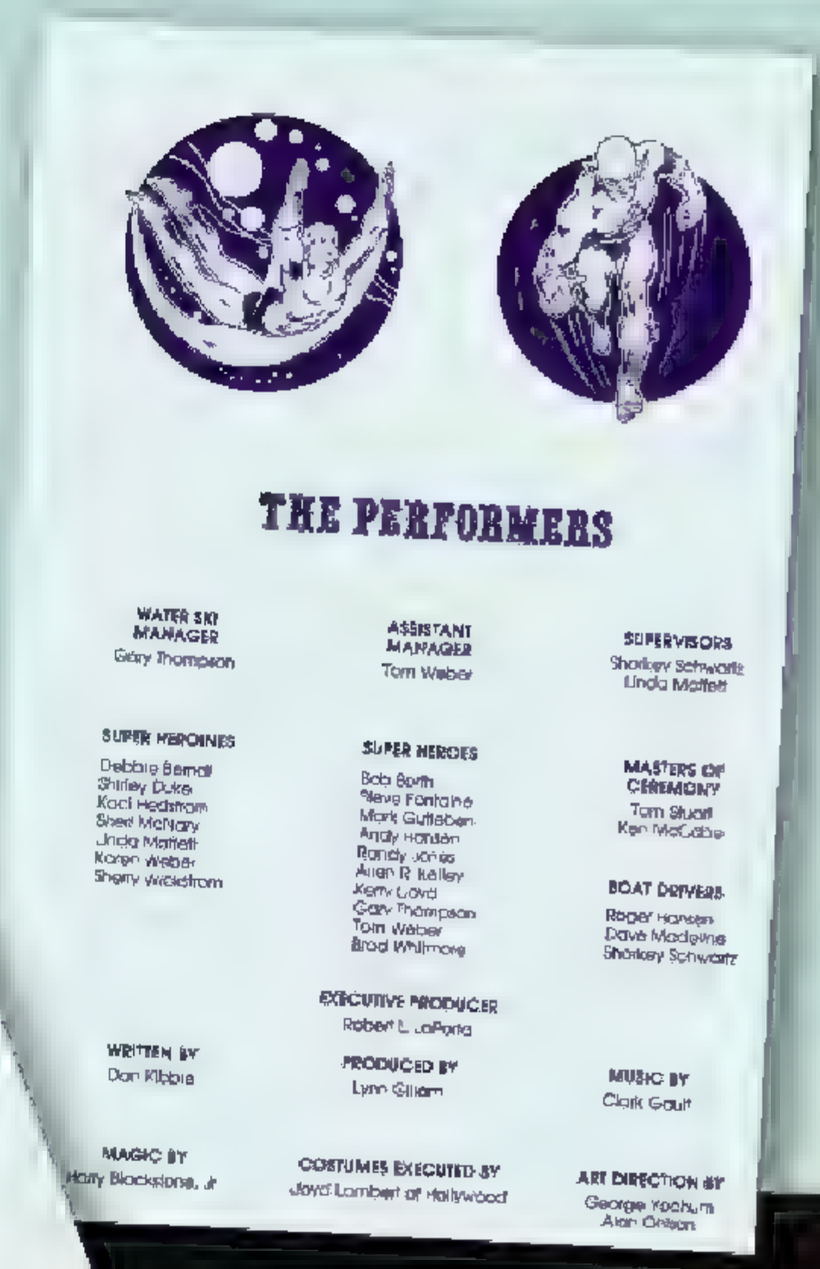
The exciting program has remained a fond memory for all who were involved in its production and to all of those lucky kids who crowded into stadiums in Ohio and Florida to see their idols live. Gary Thompson, performer and Water Ski Director for the parks

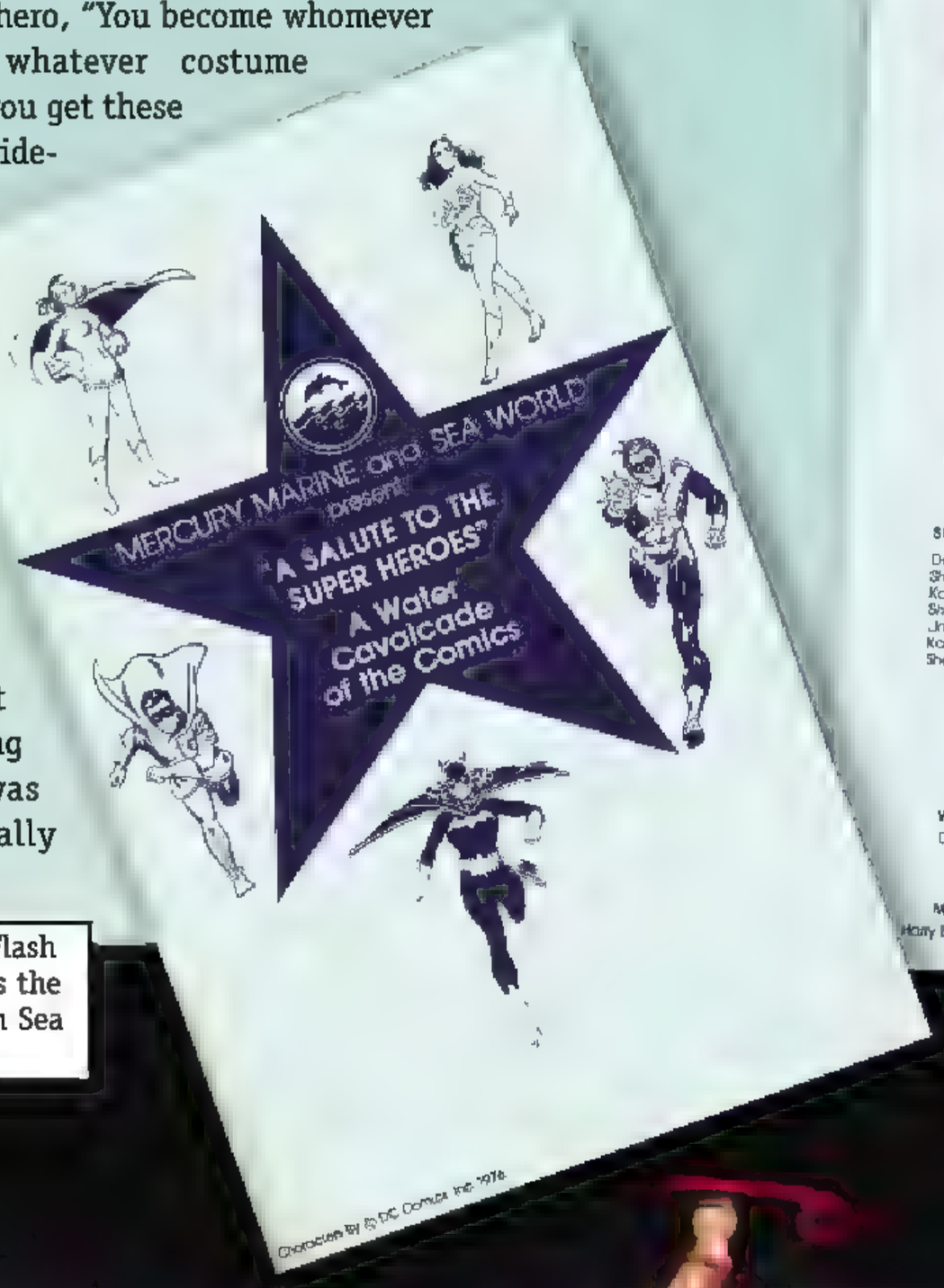
The Riddler and Captain Cold "drive" through the water in Sea World Orlando, 1977.

Boat drivers testing out their rides at Sea World Orlando, 1977.

remembered, "It was a great experience and a memorable chapter in my professional career. *Salute to the Super Heroes* was hugely successful at Sea World and represented an industry breakthrough in theming water ski shows." Valaree Morris agreed, adding, "Skiing at Sea World was one of the highlights in my life." Tom Weber summed up his experience as a superhero, "You become whomever you're portraying, whatever costume you're in. You know, you get these kids who were just wide-eyed, jaws open looking at these super-heroes and to them, that is who we were. So it was a treat, it was really kind of an honor to play those characters and to interact with people who thought you were something super-human. It was really neat, we really enjoyed it."

Sea World program for the Ohio, 1976 performances.




MERCURY MARINE and SEA WORLD
present
"A SALUTE TO THE SUPER HEROES"
A Water Cavalcade of the Comics
Characters ™ & © DC Comics Inc 1976

Always a show-off, The Flash (John MacQueen) dazzles the crowd on his shoe skis in Sea World Orlando, in 1977.

You have seen it on TV... Now see him for the first time on the BIG Cinema Screen.

THE INCREDIBLE HULK

NRC

THE MOVIE

A scientist is exposed to a massive dose of gamma rays and becomes a superhuman beast...

Starring

BILL BIXBY LOU FERRIGNO SUSAN SULLIVAN JACK COLVIN

Produced by KENNETH JOHNSON Written and Directed by KENNETH JOHNSON

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Get more out of life... GO OUT to a movie.

Released by filmways

Popular 1970s Hulk licensing illustration by artist John Romita.

chapter 10

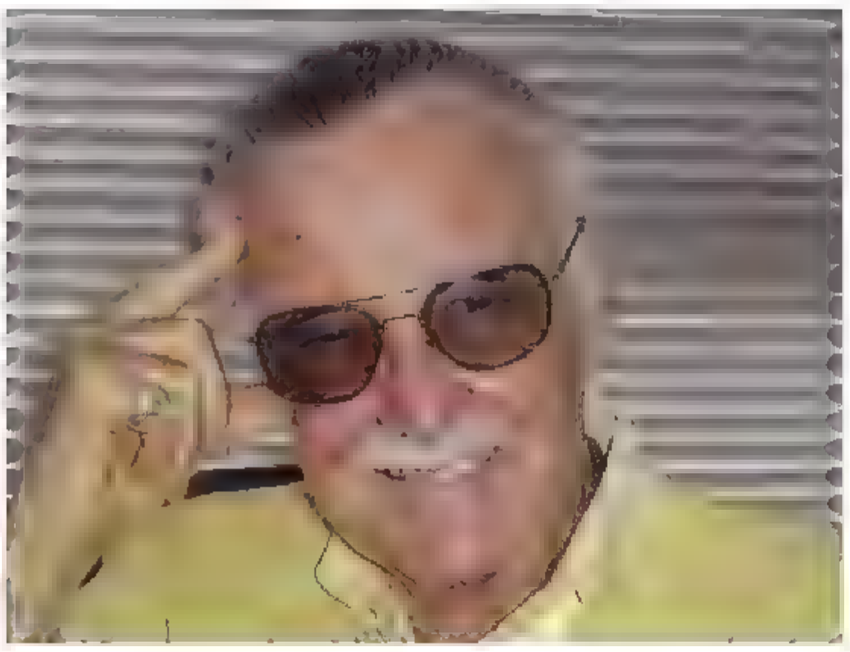
THE INCREDIBLE HULK

During a test of his Gamma-Bomb creation for the military, physicist Dr. Robert Bruce Banner finds himself caught in the eye of a nuclear explosion while saving the life of a young trespasser. Instead of killing him, the radiation now transforms the inhibited Banner—when enraged—into a seven-foot, one-thousand pound, savage, green creature of rage. He is an ogre-like monster of unlimited power whose strength only increases the madder he becomes, while his mind only becomes increasingly more childlike. There are those that say that the monster's fury is a result of Banner's emotional repression from an abusive childhood and being a social outsider. At the core, the creature only wants to be left alone in a "peace" that he will never find. Thus Bruce Banner is cursed, hunted by everyone, including his own demons, and destined to share the rest of his life with the monster inside of him known to the world as The Incredible Hulk.

One of the key characters who brought the Marvel Age to the forefront during the Silver Age was The Hulk. Conceived by the brilliant minds of writer Stan Lee and artist Jack Kirby, the character was heavily based upon the literary classics of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. With his debut, in his 1962 self-titled comic book, the creature struck a nerve with readers who could relate to the inner pathos of The Hulk—understanding that the true hero of the book was the misunderstood monster who never wanted to hurt anyone in the first place. The Marvel Comics of the sixties were modern day parables that showed a generation of readers that were ready to open their imaginations that superhero comics weren't just for kids anymore. With his cosmic appeal, The Hulk quickly made his first small-screen appearance in 1966, as part of *The Marvel Super-Heroes* cartoon show by Grantray-Lawrence.

During the mid-seventies, James Galton, then Marvel's president, realized the untapped potential his library of characters would have in terms of licensing revenue in Hollywood. "I started working on the live-action side of it," explained Galton. "And we made contact with Universal—I made them come to us. And we made our first deal for live-action [shows] with Universal." That deal would lead to the development of several Marvel properties for CBS Television. Immediately, Frank Price, head of Universal's Television Division at the time, looked to producer/writer/director Kenneth Johnson, the man who revitalized *The Six Million Dollar Man* and created *The Bionic Woman*, to choose any project he wanted from a list that included Captain America, Sub-Mariner, Human Torch, Doctor Strange and The Hulk.

Initially, Johnson resisted the entire notion of doing any more superhero-type shows, not wanting to be pigeon-holed in



Writer and Hulk co-creator Stan "The Man" Lee, a pivotal force behind the Marvel Comics universe.

Iconic comics artist and Hulk co-creator Jack Kirby at work in 1965.

Actor Bill Bixby in the role that highlighted his career, Dr. David Banner.

Actor Jack Colvin as the intense and relentless reporter, Jack McGee.

the genre, until an encounter with a classic novel brought forth the potential of one of the projects. "I don't deal with people in spandex," said Kenneth. "And it was only because my wife Suzie had given me *Les Miserables* to read that I had the whole fugitive thing in my head, and that's where I realized there was a way to make [it], take a little Robert Louis Stevenson, a little Jekyll and Hyde, a little Victor Hugo, and this ludicrous thing called *The Incredible Hulk*, and make a psychological drama out of it."

Writing about the inner-turmoil of Hulk came relatively easy to Johnson, who within a week had written the script to what would be the two-hour pilot. Quickly, he realized the need for a lead actor who could capture the sensitive complexities of Dr. Banner, and he found those qualities in his only choice to lead the series—Bill Bixby. The veteran actor had zero interest in playing the character, perhaps perceiving the project to be childish, but his agent persisted. When he finally read the screenplay, he was immediately smitten. "When I read the script, I realized that I had the opportunity of doing a series in the genre of the 'creature films' of the forties that featured Frankenstein, the Wolfman, Jekyll and Hyde," uttered the late actor in an interview for *The Hulk* magazine in 1978. "I believe that, in the long run, the original movie itself will become a classic—a television classic. I really do believe that... He is the personification of anger. He is anger brought to a physical sense."

With Bixby and Johnson's involvement, the network ordered two two-hour movies based upon the treatment. In adapting The Hulk's plight, the writer changed a few things from the comics, most noticeably the name of Bruce to David Banner because, "I was trying to get away from that comic book Lois Lane alliteration kind of stuff, so that it sounded a little more real." To keep the believability of the show, super-villains like The Leader and Abomination were out as well. Rather, Banner's adversary was a meddlesome reporter named Jack McGee, played sharply by character actor Jack Colvin, who was only seeking the truth behind Banner's experiment. Johnson thought that it was enough work asking viewers to accept the destructive Hulk, and having other colorful larger-than-life characters would have diminished the drama he was presenting.

Ken's strongest revision was within The Hulk's origin, which made the creature's plight even more tragic. In it, Dr.

A facial make-up appliance being applied to Bill Bixby, a process which the actor reportedly did not like.

"The Three Musketeers"—Bill Bixby with his white contact lenses, Ken Johnson and Lou Ferrigno in the earlier, more primitive-looking Hulk make-up during the filming of the pilot.

David Banner, a geneticist, is a happily married man with a lovely wife, and lives a life that seems perfect. Yet, when he doesn't have the stamina to save his bride from a burning car, his world crumbles—he becomes obsessed with discovering a way to tap into man's superhuman strength. David can't live with the fact that others in similar dire scenarios had summoned an inner-strength that they didn't even know they possessed to save their loved ones. While experimenting with gamma rays in the hopes that they can trigger that power, he overdoses on the dangerous radiation, and develops a Jekyll and Hyde personality that he can't control when he loses his cool. Coincidentally, this tale is much closer to what inspired Jack Kirby when creating the character. "The Hulk I created when I saw a woman lift a car," he uttered to Gary Groth, back in a 1990 interview. "Her baby was caught under the running board... His mother was horrified... and this woman in desperation lifted the rear end of

The first appeareance of The Hulk (Lou Ferrigno) in the series' pilot episode.

Any kind of severe emotional trauma forced David Banner (Bill Bixby) to transform into the monster he wanted to bury.

Dr. David Banner (Bill Bixby)—physician, scientist—searching for a way to tap into the hidden strengths that all humans have.

the car! It suddenly came to me that in desperation we can do that—we can knock down walls, we can go berserk, which we can do. You know what happens when we're in a rage—you can tear a house down."

The casting of The Hulk became the most difficult challenge to the production of the pilot. Actor Richard Kiel, best known for his role of "Jaws" in the James Bond series, was picked to play the creature. At 7'2" tall, Kiel seemed like the right choice, but when production started the producers knew something was wrong. Even with the green body-paint, colored contact lenses, prosthetics, costume and height, he lacked the muscular presence needed to be the personification of Hulk, and was let go only days into filming.

Forced to recast the role, Johnson remembered meeting Lou Ferrigno. The premiere body builder had been recommended by Arnold Schwarzenegger during Johnson's initial search for The Hulk. After a quick screen-test in character, Johnson and Bixby realized that Lou was the embodiment of Hulk, and although he had no acting experience and was afflicted with near complete deafness, he not only looked the part but understood the nature of his character from having been an admirer of the comic book. With Ferrigno being the final piece of the puzzle, the stars were now aligned.

On November 4 of 1977, the pilot premiered on CBS in America, and instantly became a hit with critics and the public. It would soon be released theatrically to the rest of the world. Its ending cleverly provided the premise for Hulk to be a potential regular series, as the character of David Banner fakes his own death in order to find the cure to his dilemma while also protecting everyone from his anger. Alone, he becomes a man without a name, home, finances or love, constantly running away from anyone who might discover his shame—especially from reporter Jack McGee of *The National Register*, the man obsessed with discovering the truth behind the creature. When the second film, "A Death in the Family", debuted on television on November 27 of the same year with its more episodic treatment, it drew similar positive praise—viewers were now craving a television series, while the network was resisting. "And, even after we had done both of those, Frank [Price] and I were sitting with Bud Grant, who was then the head of CBS, and Bud didn't get it," said Johnson. "He didn't think there was a series there. And it took us two or three meetings to convince them, of course there's a series here! And finally they put it on the air, and ba-boom, it was one of CBS' big consistent hits on Friday nights for four-and-a-half, five years."

The Hulk about to see his reflection for the first time in an homage to *Frankenstein*.

A publicity photo of Lou Ferrigno as The Hulk (note the flesh-colored make-up, indicating the color was going to be added by lighting effects).

The Incredible Hulk hit television stations across the country as a CBS mid-season replacement on March 10, 1978 in a weekly one-hour series format. From the second Ted Cassidy, the actor who played Lurch on *The Addams Family*, recited the tragic narration in the opening credits, till the show closed with Joseph Harnell's somber "Lonely Man" theme during the closing credits, audiences were enraptured every Friday night. People responded to Bixby's sensitive portrayal of Banner, a role he played with an earnest, everyman quality that allowed that accessibility. Ferrigno, likewise, made all believe that The Hulk really walked amongst us. Like Boris Karloff before him, he effectively displayed the creature's destructiveness as well as his benevolence. Under Kenneth Johnson's creative vision, the program struck the right chords and quickly became a fixture at the top of the Nielsen ratings, helping to anchor CBS' Friday nights with *The Dukes of Hazzard* and *Dallas*. The success of show also helped greenlight more superhero shows from not only

Lou Ferrigno, between takes in Times Square (note his green colored slippers).

Writer/Director Ken Johnson and titular star Lou Ferrigno chat after a take during the filming of "Terror in Times Square," 1978.

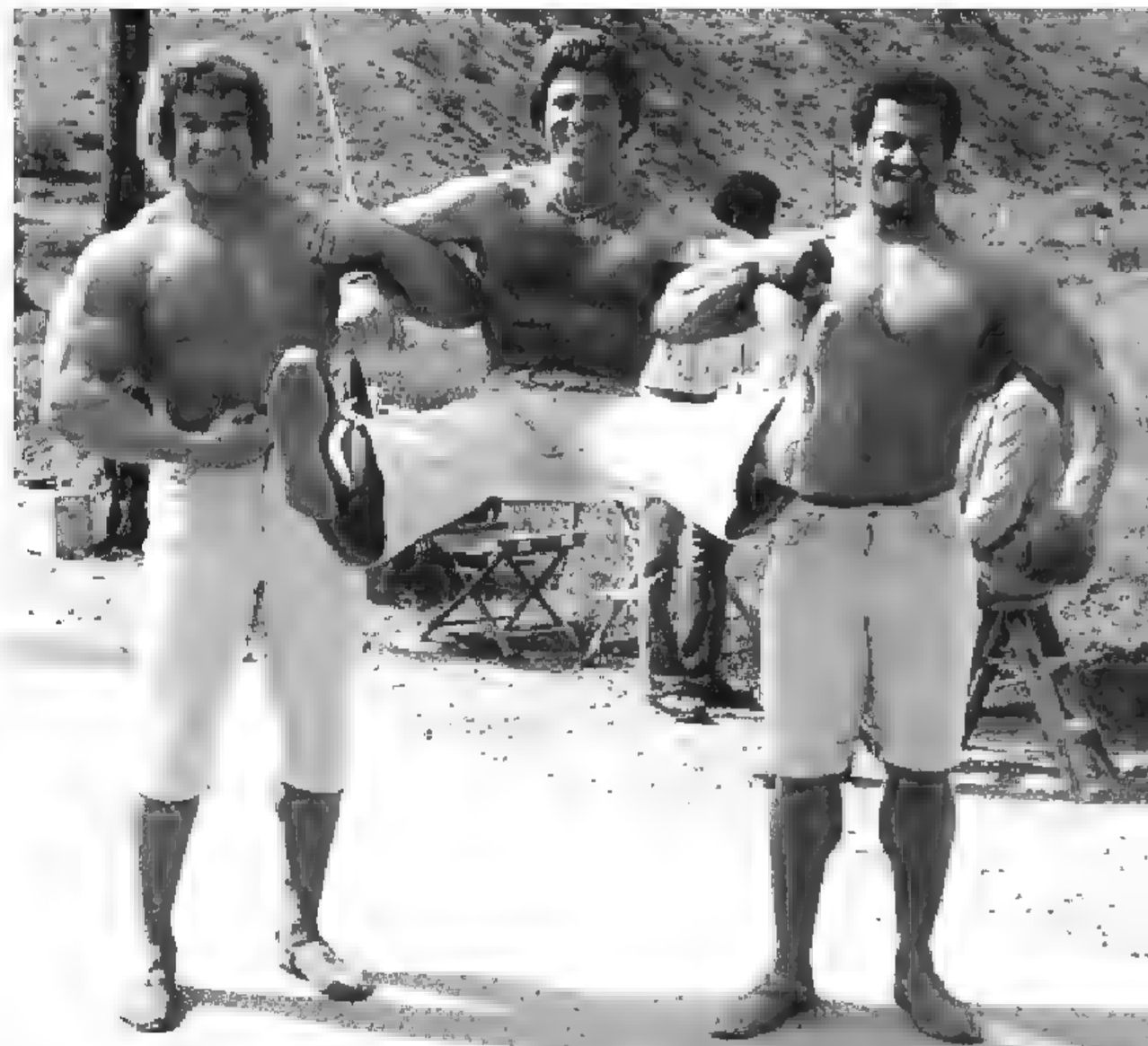
CBS but the other networks as well. Yet, many of them lacked the humility that made Johnson's *Hulk* a success.

Stan Lee, The Hulk's co-creator, was overjoyed with the interpretation of Hulk on the small screen. "[Kenneth Johnson] more than captured it," Stan fondly remembered. "He did things I wouldn't have thought of that were brilliant. Like, he didn't have The Hulk speak at all! Because at the time he was doing The Hulk movie, as I remember, in the comic books, The Hulk would say things like 'Me Hulk, me crush! Hulk angry!'—all that nonsensical-type of primitive dialogue. Well, it was okay for the comic books, but it would have looked stupid in an adult show, live-action, and Ken was also smart enough to know that. So he didn't have him speak at all. He was also smart enough to do the show in such away that it appealed to women, to adults—it didn't seem like a real comic-booky show. In fact, if you think about it you only saw The Hulk for three or four minutes in the beginning of the show, and three or four minutes at the end. And the rest of the time it was some sort of dramatic, romantic mystery with [David] Banner. He treated the show perfectly to attract an eight o'clock general family audience. You waited till you could see The Hulk. Everyone was on the edge of their seat waiting for the scene when he would turn into The Hulk and you'd see his shirt snap open, and his shoulder popping out, and his eyes turning green... It was something that people looked forward to."

"Oh, we did repeat ourselves," says Johnson about the plots within the show. Throughout the series, the crew's biggest concern, with its *Fugitive*-style premise, was trying to come up with fresh storytelling ideas. "I mean, the basic pattern of the show was that there'd be a Hulk-out before the end of Act Two, and there'd be a Hulk-out by the end of Act Four somewhere. And it was very, very, very hard to try to find ways to break that pattern. And we were always looking for new twists on it, for starting the show in the middle of a Hulk-out, for ending the show without one but still having some drama and some action, because it was tricky. You want to give the audience what they're looking for and waiting for, 'Oh boy, his eyes have turned white. Watch, out, boys!', and give them that enjoyment, but at the same time, when you're doing 88 hours of it, how do you do it and not have it get too silly? I enjoyed immensely thinking of different ways for Bixby to be prompted into Hulking out that did not involve him getting beaten up. Well, look at the pilot. It happens because he's changing a tire."

For five years, as Kenneth Johnson's creative vision drove every single aspect of the show—from pre-production to post-production—all of the burdens that arose were on his shoulders. Despite the success of the show, their high budget was under constant scrutiny by the suits at Universal. At times this was reflected on the screen and the grueling schedule the crew endured. Lou was also starting to feel more boxed in by his character. He wanted to do more as an actor, and the hectic demands of the show had cost him a few opportunities that he saw as beneficial to his career. And no one was prepared for the sudden death of Bill Bixby's six-year-old son Christopher, as the actor was working on the fourth season of *Hulk*. It devastated the performer, who coped by burying himself even deeper in his work and bottling up his sadness. "Bill went through an incredibly bitter, acrimonious divorce, and expended a huge amount of personal energy in that, the vehemence and the anger," remembered Ken Johnson. "And then, a year or so after that, his child died at six years old, and the loss of Christopher was stunning to all of us, because, I mean, when he was a kid, he was on the set all the time, and he was like family for all of us... But it was a dark time."

During summer hiatus, after the completion of the fourth season in 1981, CBS cancelled the beloved program despite respectable ratings, shocking everyone, especially the creator. Still surprised, Ken noted, "Harvey Sheppard, who had been running CBS for about twenty minutes, made a lot of bad calls,



Lou Ferrigno, stunt co-ordinator and Bill Bixby's stunt double Frank Orsatti, and Lou Ferrigno's stunt double Manny Perry.

and *Hulk* was one of them. I think we had five or six shows in the can that had not aired by the end of our last season, and Harvey just didn't think there was another year. And I said, 'Harvey, you've got five shows in the can.' I said, 'Buy half a dozen more, and you've got a half a season and we'll see what happens. And here's a way to open the last season: Bill Bixby's sister,' whom we had established somewhere along the line, Banner's sister is dying of a congenital disease, and the only thing that can save her is a transfusion from a sibling. And I said, 'Now, what happens, Harvey, if someone gets Hulk blood into them?' And I said, 'Now, I'm not going to give you a bra-popping She-Hulk,' because I felt that was just too silly for words, 'But I will give you a woman who is crazy and really dangerous! And, that our hero has to either kill, or save, or both.' And I said, 'It'll be a smash way to open the season!' And Harvey just sort of smiled and said, 'No, I don't think so,' and cancelled the show. And it was a surprise. And later on he apologized. 'Oh, I guess I made a mistake there.' And I said, 'Yeah, Harvey, I guess you did.'"

Because of the abrupt nature of the cancellation there would be no series finale to give closure to Banner's odyssey. Johnson and his crew had, however, completed seven episodes, which were aired on most CBS affiliates at the start of new fall season in 1981. They became known to fans as the "fifth season" because Hulk remained on primetime via the showing of these new episodes and reruns (from prior seasons) until the end of the television season on May 12, 1982. With the show over, cast and crew moved on to other ventures. Bixby landed the lead in the network comedy *Goodnight Beantown* for CBS with actress Mariette Hartley; the actress won an Emmy for her guest appearance on *Hulk*. Ferrigno became part of ensemble show called *Trauma Center* for ABC and starred in theatrical features like *Hercules and The Seven Magnificent Gladiators*. Kenneth Johnson wrote and directed *V*, a massive NBC mini-series event

Ken Johnson, Bill Bixby and crew look on during rehearsals for a scene from the second season two-part opener, "Married".

Ken Johnson directs the filming of a sequence with Bill Bixby, from the fourth season premiere episode, "Prometheus".

Lou Ferrigno listens to Ken Johnson as a make-up artist touches up his Hulk coloring. On location in the deserts of Brawley, California during the filming of the "Married" storyline.

Show creator Ken Johnson hears out guest-star Mariette Hartley during the filming of the two-part second season opener, "Married".

Capturing The Hulk, in a behind-the-scenes shot from the two-part, Married episode.

that drew over 80 million viewers and quickly became a series. And The Hulk never really went away as he returned in animated shows like 1982's *The Incredible Hulk and The Amazing Spider-Man* hour on NBC and a 1996 UPN self-titled show in which Lou Ferrigno finally voiced the character.

In the years following the show, Bill Bixby lobbied to get The Hulk back on television. He eventually was successful enough to get New World Pictures, who owned Marvel Comics during the mid-eighties, to back a series of three television movies that would serve to introduce viewers to other Marvel characters on NBC. For these films, Ferrigno returned to play the part that made him famous with Bixby, who now also served as the producer of the films and director in the latter two. The first one, 1988's *The Incredible Hulk Returns*, finds David Banner and The Hulk coming out from their peaceful slumber to help the Mighty Thor. 1989's *The Trial of the Incredible Hulk* has David

The Hulk (Lou Ferrigno) encounters Frye's Creature (*Swamp Thing* actor Dick Durock) in the fourth season two-part episode, "The First".

Please don't make him angry. Banner (Bill Bixby) seconds from becoming Hulk.

Banner being defended by Matt Murdock, Daredevil, for a crime he didn't commit. And, finally, *The Death of the Incredible Hulk* finds man and monster in their final battle as Banner is finally freed from his heavy burden in death. The three films proved to be rating successes—but without Kenneth Johnson's participation, they lacked the humanism that made the original series popular, and became more about superhero theatrics. There were already plans to bring The Hulk back in even more telefilms but the sad passing of Bill Bixby in 1993 from colon cancer closed the book.

And still, among all the incarnations of the green goliath—the two theatrical films, the cartoons, the comics, the video games, or anything else—the most popular remains the body of work that Kenneth Johnson, Bill Bixby and Lou Ferrigno did in the series. Even after the cancellation of show, these episodes have remained in syndication all over the world as people continue to watch it. It is still the longest lasting live-action program based on a Marvel comic book and the work that ingrained The Hulk into the popular culture; it made the character identifiable throughout the globe. They did all of this with minimal violence and with moral parables that invoked not only a modern day mythology, but a nobility of life: a little bit of plain, ordinary, everyday kindness and a little looking out for the other fella, too. As Johnson explained, "The characters are archetypes. They hit you at a visceral level because they are classic characters."

"The Hulk is a great psychological symbol," Bixby told an interviewer once. "The show is really saying, 'Take a look, folks, this is what anger can be—so when you get angry, understand that there is a green giant in you... if you choose to let him out. But, if you do, remember that you have such awesome power in your anger that you can hurt a lot of people. Don't hurt people, and try not to hurt yourself."

So, Banner must let the world go on thinking that he, too, is dead, until he can find a way to control the raging Hulk that dwells within him. Co-stars and close friends, Bill Bixby and Lou Ferrigno made *The Incredible Hulk* one of the more personal superhero series to air on television.

chapter 11

SWAMP THING

From the muck and moss of the humid Louisiana bayou came a classic green monster. It sprung from the imaginations of writer Len Wein and artist Bernie Wrightson in *House of Secrets* #92. In the pages of *Swamp Thing* #1 (1972), the tyrant trying to steal Dr. Alec Holland's bio-restorative formula sets the scientist ablaze. He runs into the swamp towards his death, drenched in his own creation. Soon after, a vegetative creature emerges from the same waters; the few that see it call it Swamp Thing. Under the pen of Alan Moore in later years, Swampy was shown to be a plant elemental—one in a long line of powerful plant elementals on earth—whose only true relation to Alec Holland was that his consciousness was based on that of the deceased scientist.

The success of 1982's *Swamp Thing* film, directed and written by Wes Craven, and its subsequent sequel, *The Return of Swamp Thing*, inspired television executives to develop a series for the mossy crusader. Michael E. Uslan (producer of both films and executive producer of the TV series) recalled the staggering success of the first big screen project. "I remember at some point Ben [Melniker] and I received independently over a period of a few weeks, a call from an exec at Showtime and an executive at HBO, and they both asked us to come into meetings. We went to these meetings independently and they said, 'Alright, this movie, this little picture *Swamp Thing* with the rubber suit, did huge numbers on video and it went to TV and it went into syndicated TV, and at the time it came out it was ranked the fourth highest-rated movie in syndicated television history.' And then it went to HBO and Showtime and the meetings were very similar. 'Explain what are we seeing here? We put it on and the ratings were terrific, so we brought it back three months later and the ratings went up. So we brought it back six months later and the ratings went up.' They said, 'What's going on here? What is this all about?'"

When *The Return of Swamp Thing* movie proved lighter in tone and more accessible to children, the character became even more attractive to entertainment companies. As Uslan said, "That turned out to work particularly well, because as a result of that, we got a Kenner toy line, an animated mini-series from Fox Kids, and then DiC—we had worked with Andy Kayward and DiC on *Dinosaucers*—came in and said, 'We're trying to expand and do more live-action.' And Universal was interested in doing *Swamp Thing* as a live-action TV series. So Universal, who brought in USA Networks/Science Fiction channel, they won a one-time license to do a live-action TV series, and we gave Fox Kids a one-time license to do an animated *Swamp Thing* series. We made the deal with Kenner, the toy line, and actually I

Adrienne Barbeau and Dick Durock from the first *Swamp Thing* feature film, 1982.

Swamp Thing (Dick Durock) encourages you to think green in his swamps.

Despite the complexities of heavy make-up, actor Dick Durock gave his character plenty of soul and personality.

think both the live-action and the animation came out roughly around the same time, with one having nothing to do with the other."

Developing *Swamp Thing: The Series* were fine writers like Joseph Stefano, the screenwriter of *Psycho* and a key visionary on *The Outer Limits* series. With the help of producer Boris Malden, Stefano would bring the show closer to its horror comic roots than the previous two films. The series was a fresh start for the character since it didn't follow the continuity of the films. The show's format was somewhat that of a half-hour anthology series that would have the green hero facing the latest terrifying dilemmas or troublemakers that would disturb his muddy lair. During the first season, the hero interacted with a young troubled companion named Jimmy Kipp (played by young actor Jesse Zeigler) that merely needed someone to look up to (and hopefully lure in younger viewers). All throughout the series, his constant nemesis was Dr. Anton Arcane. British actor Mark Lindsay Chapman portrayed the gentleman villain as a suave yet fundamentally sinister figure that would unleash his hatred and his horrific monsters at the courageous marshy champion of the bayou.

To play the titular role of Swamp Thing, the late Dick Durock was the only choice after portraying the character twice on the big screen with so much integrity and nobility. At 6'6" tall, Durock used his size and grit to break into Hollywood as a stuntman in many great Hollywood films and classic television shows. Despite having acted in various small roles in his career, the *Swamp Thing* films showcased much of his dramatic side, despite his being covered by his mossy costume.

"It was something I always had on my mind," Dick Durock reflected about the beginnings of his career. "It wasn't acting in particular, but it certainly had no influence being born in South Bend, Indiana. The only Hollywood influence was the neighborhood theater. Like all the kids who go out on Saturday mornings and cheer and boo and see the serials, sometimes it stuck in my head. I said, 'God, I want to do it someday.' I didn't know exactly why, but I knew that I was going to do it. It wasn't a dream; I just knew it, for some reason. After I got out of the [Marine] Corps, I bounced around in

John Candy, unknown actor, Mariel Hemingway, Dick Durock and John Candy's stand-in on the set of *Delirious*, 1990.

Swamp Thing (Dick Durock) and Abby (Heather Locklear) from *The Return of Swamp Thing* feature, 1989.

college and had a bunch of college credits here... I got into computers in 1962—IBM 1401, believe it or not—as a programmer, out of courses out at Notre Dame. And I said, 'Nah, I'd be miserable doing this.' I'm just not cut out that way—I have to do something a little more physical. So anyhow, I just jumped in an old Studebaker I had and went out to California and starved for four or five years, and got to meeting people and trained with different stunt guys and finally some doors started opening up. And my size certainly helped. There aren't too many guys six-feet-four or -five that are stunt people. And I had a fair amount of athletic ability, so it just worked out. There were some tough times, but anybody that doesn't have tough times in this business is very, very rare."

Originally brought to the first *Swamp Thing* movie as a stuntman, Durock came to the forefront as the title character by necessity. He explained, "Ray Wise was the original Alec Holland in the first film, a good actor, another really nice guy. They thought they were going to film me in all the full shots and the physical stuff, and running around and tipping over trucks and all that, and then when they cut to a close-up, it'd be Ray. I'd put on the shoulders, the face make-up, and I knew that wasn't going to work. I had enough experience to know you can't go from a full shot to a close-up, to a full shot, to a close-up. It would drive the audience crazy. And I also knew that with the same make-up, the exact same make-up, no two people are going to look the same. So Wes Craven called. He asked about the script and he says, 'What do you think?' He said, 'Come on down to the house.' He lived in Venice, on the beach. He said, 'Let's talk about this and let me pick your brain a little bit. What you can do in a suit and what you can't do, because you have limitations wearing a latex suit.' Anyhow, he said, 'Are you thinking what I'm thinking, that we're not going to be able to go from a full shot to a tight shot to using Ray?' And I said, 'Exactly! It's not going to work.' He said, 'Well, prepare to do the whole thing.' This guy had a ton of dialogue. So he said, 'Just be prepared to do the whole thing.' Now, you had to prove it to the producers, who weren't quite buying the idea. So they made up Ray and I, side-by-side, and saw a lot of difference. So they finally understood that it wasn't going to work."

In the first film, Swamp Thing's voice was actor Ray Wise, but for the series, Durock provided most of the voice. It was electronically altered to give it a more supernatural tone. But no actor could ever imagine how difficult it is to act and portray this character with the weight of the costume and the heat generated from the lights and the surroundings. During the filming of the series, the actor regularly found himself working six-day weeks and spending ten or more hours in costume. "I said I'd stay hot," Durock said about wearing the costume in the Florida heat, "and I'd pre-hydrate. I'd stay hydrated during the day and these guys would spray you down to keep the latex wet, and that's how we got through it, on both the movies and the 72 episodes of the series."

The actor added, "It was so extraordinarily difficult, and if you want proof of that, look at Robert DeNiro made up as Frankenstein. Now, he's a brilliant actor, but what you do with all the crap is totally different than when you're wearing fifty, sixty pounds of make-up, your face is all covered... In fact, a real interesting sidelight—in the first *Swamp Thing* facial make-up, they had a rubber kind of mask covering my lips, and thunderbolt contact lenses in. All kinds of strange stuff! I said, 'Look, this guy's got a ton of dialogue, and it's going to look stupid.' Y'know, all this weird stuff. 'Let me have my eyes, because that's the only thing I have left to act with, with my eyes and with my mouth. So we finally didn't put the rubber lips on, and my eyes were my eyes. You don't have a lot to act with outside of your body language—you have to have a lot of faith in the director because it's so easy to go overboard wearing all that stuff because you don't realize you're doing it. It just magnified wearing all the extraneous make-up."

Jimmy Kipp (Jesse Zeigler) and Swamp Thing (Dick Durock) in a scene from the series' first season.

Dick Durock shares a tender moment with a young admirer between takes.

Filming for the show took place in Universal Florida Studios, with some occasional shooting in nearby hot locations due to its tight budget and hectic schedule. "You know what's funny?" the actor uttered. "In the regular series they built the swamp right next to the sound stage at Universal Studios in Orlando, and the damned phony swamp looked better than the real one. Because the real swamps there didn't have that hanging mystery shadows and the mysterious shadows. Hell, most of it was bright and open and full of alligators and snakes and leeches. We had a lot of control overall, a built swamp where we could shoot at night and light it really mysterious. We did a lot of night shooting. And there was a whole bunch more control without having to travel to a neighborhood swamp and without the snakes and gators and all the other bad things in the old water there."

The first episode, "The Emerald Heart", premiered on July 27th of 1990 as a summer preview for the series on the USA Network. It was one of thirteen ordered episodes that the cast and crew filmed in less than seven weeks, extremely grueling work for any production. Originally the series was to be a summer series for 1990, but the network later decided to just to tease fans with one episode so that they'd anticipate its proper fall season debut. With all the buzz and press the network was receiving for the show, the television brass wanted to meet again with Michael Uslan and his producing partner Benjamin Melniker about their *Swamp Thing* deal. The network was about to present the producing team with an unprecedented offer they couldn't refuse.

In regard to USA's pitch, Uslan disclosed, "The idea was we would do 13 of these, and if we had success in the ratings with 13, they would give us an order for a back 9, meaning 22 episodes per season. Now, at that time, and probably to this day, a 22-episode possibility was unbelievable. That was terrific! In fact, just getting a commitment for 13 is very difficult to get these days upfront. So the economics were very good. We went forward with the USA Network and Universal Television. The results came in so strong on those 13 shows that they came to us about the back 9. We had said to them, 'You know, the more episodes you order, we can bring down the cost of the show. We can amortize the special effects, the make-up, the costumes, the sets and everything and really bring down the cost per episode. They said, 'Well, how many would you need to get it down to cost of such and such?' So we gave them a figure. To make a long story short, they came back with an order for 72 episodes. Which blew us away! It was unbelievable. I don't know how often that's happened in television history. That was utterly, utterly, utterly amazing. So roughly in less than a year and a half, we turned out 72 episodes, and it still works because the Sci-Fi Network keeps bringing it out approximately once a year for a 24-hour weekend *Swamp Thing* marathon, and they do well with it."

One of the key differences between the show and films was the redesign made to the Swamp Thing full-body costume by Tony Gardner's Alterian Studios. With the new costume, *Swamp Thing* became more vivid, and truer to the comics, with a body

that was now covered in greater detail with vegetation. The new alterations allowed Durock to emote more power, feeling and pathos with his character. Also, the prep time to put on the costume was cut to 45 minutes compared to the multiple-hour process from the features. Durock acquainted, "First of all, it wasn't a mask. It was 4 or 5 different little pieces. So those expressions, they were me. There was no mask at all. The costume still weighed 80 pounds at the end of the day, or 45 pounds dry. It was bigger in the musculature. And the face make-up on the series was by far the best of all of them, I think."

When Stefano exited the show (after the initial 13 episodes), the network dropped the child co-star and began to move towards stronger sci-fi-grounded stories with more supernatural roots. It began to even address ecological issues. Durock said, "It was the politics involved in every show, but then they picked us up for 50, which was unheard of. 50 episodes in a row! Which naturally, they cut the budget a little bit because, believe it or not, it aired 2 nights a week, and we drew 6 million people, audience, every week. We were filming on a breakneck pace. My God, we were doing 10 pages a day to get it done in 3 days, and 10 pages is an enormous amount of work for... You know, most features will do half a page a day, if they're lucky."

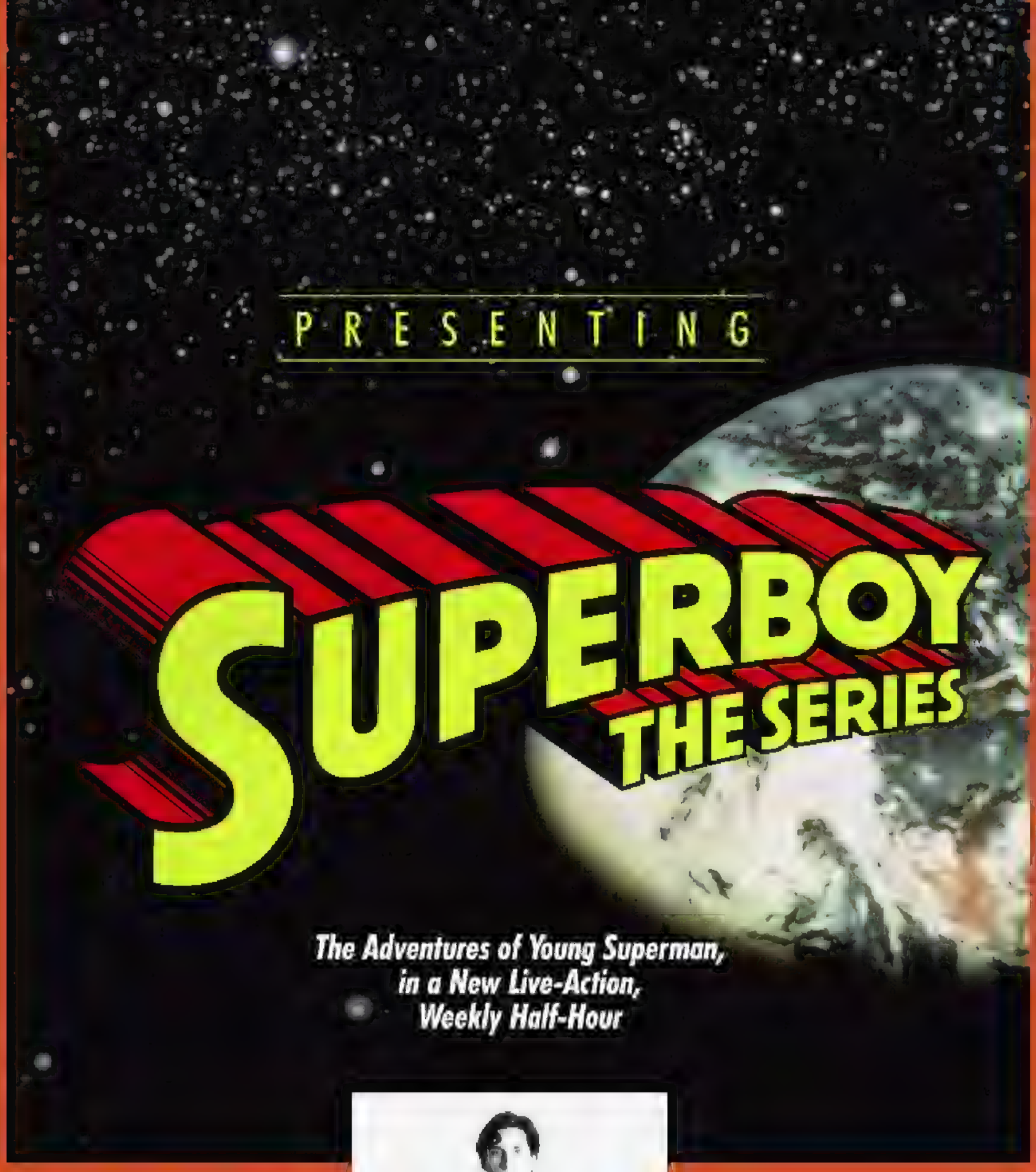
Despite his mossy exterior, playing a character that must display power and sensitivity in his body language was no easy feat. Durock expressed, "I didn't have all that much experience to get to the inner levels and see all that kind of stuff. I knew from the comic book that the guy had inner turmoil. There's a scene at the end of the first [film] when Adrienne Barbeau and I are in the swamp and I'm about to leave, and go back to the swamp and continue on my way. And she doesn't want me to go, but, yeah, I'm a plant mutant type of thing, and I cannot make love to a woman properly. I don't have that capability. All I can do is suffer emotionally if I stayed there. Things like that, you know, talking about the guy's inner torment, yet not do it so much where you depress the audience watching... By the time we got to halfway through the series, I'm choking Arcane in one of the episodes. I asked the director, 'Why don't I just kill the son of a bitch? Then we won't have to deal with him in every show!' He keeps coming back in every show to harm me. So just to add a little levity, see, but I had him in my hands every show and then I let him go. He turns out to terrorize the world."

Due to the hectic schedule, the cast and crew bonded over the production of the show. The actor and crew began to function as a unit by anticipating each others' moves. The more episodes they filmed, the easier it became to make each episode something special. "Well, you become a family," said Durock. "When you're working that hard you become a family, and everybody, I've never worked with a harder working crew than I did on the series, especially. I don't know. I think everybody was kind of glad when it was over with, because it was, y'know, 'Geez, let me just go to sleep for a couple weeks here.' I don't know, each show had its own satisfaction. When you're done you say, 'Damn. Well, this one turned out okay,' or 'this one was not so hot.' So I don't know. It's something we were all very proud of because of the amount of work that went into it. Now, you can sit back and say, 'Oh, geez, what a piece of crap this is.' But when you realize the budgets you had to work with, and the time constraints... One thing we did have, though, something they did not skimp on, they brought in some really, really good actors. Tyne Daly, Roscoe Lee Brown, Ray Wise—they brought [them] back down. A lot of good New York stage type actors; a lot of very competent actors to support me."

Even with the show being a decent rating success—at one point, USA Network's highest rated program—production on the show wrapped with the filming of their seventy-second episode. Apparently the network's feelings were that the show had run its course, with them now having more than enough of a library to showcase as reruns on a regular basis on their sister network, Sci-Fi Channel. When asked if there was ever any chance for a renewal of the show, Durock replied, "I think it was a done deal. The ratings were still up. It was probably the most popular cable show. There weren't a lot of cable productions that were doing original productions like they do now. Everybody, HBO and everybody else makes their own productions now, but then, that was kind of new ground. I think everybody knew that it was done. 'Are you going to make another one?' I know for a while there was a rumor that they were going to do a big-budget *Swamp Thing* at Warner Brothers or something, and I think that's all it was, was a rumor." The last original episode was appropriately titled "That's a Wrap" and aired on May 1 of 1993.

The work that Dick Durock did on *Swamp Thing: The Series* was an amazing feat. Few are the roles that have ever demanded so much concentration, endurance and strength. To his credit, his respect for the character and the genre made his show something to watch for a legion of rabid fans and television viewers of all walks.

"It's funny," Durock chuckled, "most people don't know me for that. The fans do, of course. But they've seen me so many times, and, all right, I did 8 *Rockford Files*, and 6 or 8 *A-Teams*, and 4 or 5 *Magnum P.I.s*, and *Fall Guy*. You name it. 3 Clint Eastwood pictures and a couple of Burt Reynolds films. A lot of people see you as your own character. When people see you as your own character, they don't recognize you unless they're Swamp Thing fans... An interesting anecdote, I was in a bookstore in Studio City just browsing around, and a little kid walks up, he could have been 5 or 6 years old or something. And he looks up at me, and I looked down at him. And he points at me and he says, 'Swamp Thing! Mama, Swamp Thing!' I said, 'How the hell does this kid know?' His mom came over and said, 'Do you play Swamp Thing?' I says, 'Yeah. How did he know?' Then it dawned on me that I've been right about insisting that they leave my eyes alone, 'cause that's all I have to act through it. The kid recognized me by my eyes. It made me happy, if a little kid can recognize me, that means I'm doing my job. At least, to his satisfaction."



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Left:
Actor Gerard Christopher as the series' second Superboy in season three.

chapter 12

SUPERBOY

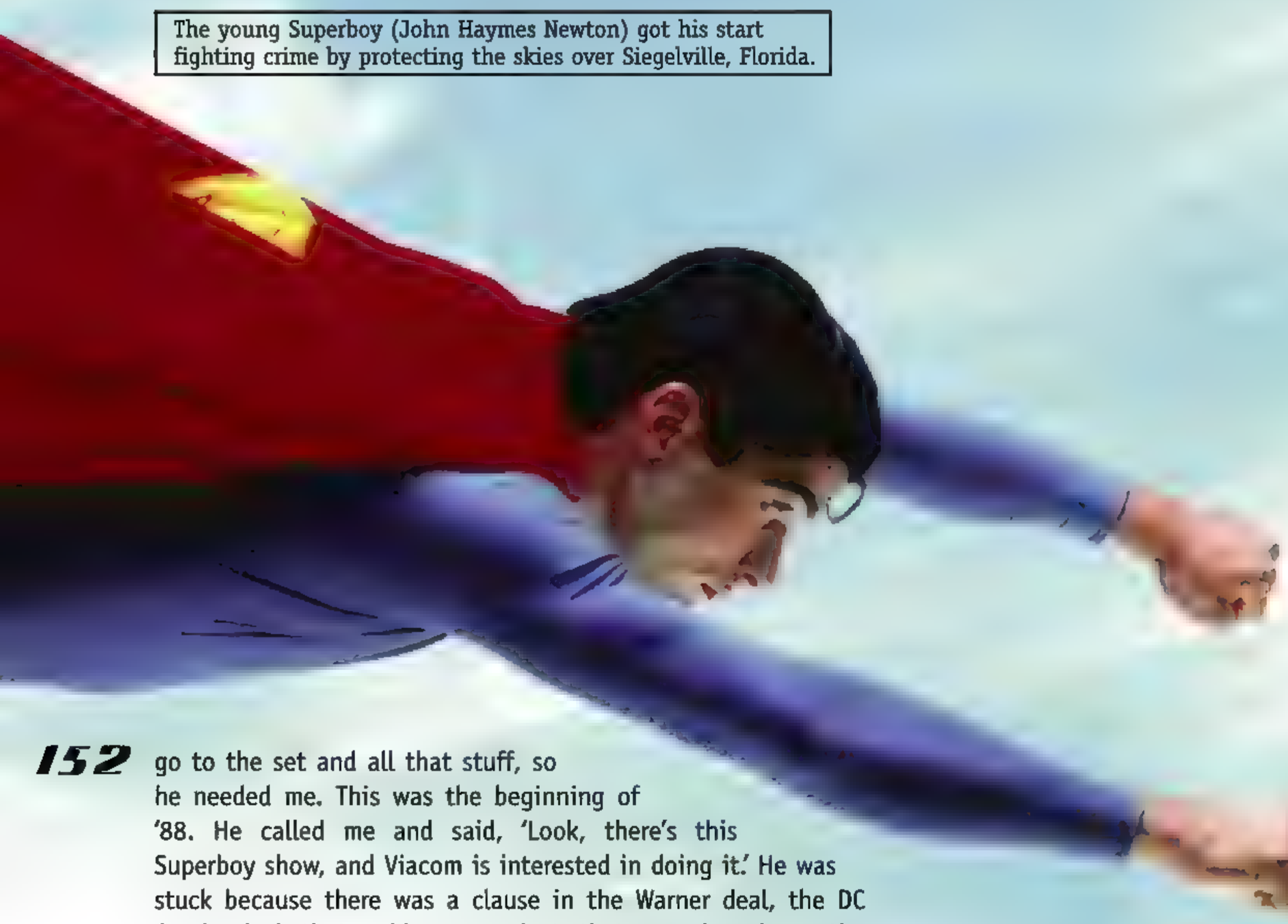
Soon after Superman was picked up by *Detective Comics* (the company that is DC Comics today) in 1938, Jerry Siegel pitched *Superboy* to his editors as kid-friendly stories that would show readers Superman's adolescent adventures and upbringing. Initially passed over, it wasn't until 1944 that the character finally appeared in *More Fun Comics* #101, within a short story illustrated by Joe Shuster, unbeknownst to his partner Siegel, who was stationed abroad as an army officer. By 1949, Superboy received his own self-titled book, a hometown now named Smallville and Lana Lang, his small-town sweetheart. Because these stories were grounded in the American heartland, it added much to Superman's mythos by showing how the Kryptonian was surrounded by good old-fashioned American ideals and the unconditional love of his adoptive parents, the Kents.

The first attempt to bring Superboy to television audiences came in 1962, shortly after the end of *Adventures of Superman*. With the very appropriate title, *The Adventures of Superboy*, the half-hour pilot was directed by George Blair and written by Vernon E. Clark and Whitney Ellsworth for Encore Entertainment. It starred John Rockwell as the young Clark Kent/Superboy, referred to as the "Champion of the Opressed and Enemy of Evil-doers!", and Bunny Henning as Lana Lang. The pilot briefly, but effectively, retold his origins in the beginning credits, which allowed the rest of the time to be devoted to a full story. It centered around a group of small-time crooks who are in Smallville to commit the robbery of $200,000 worth of uncut diamonds. The Smallville police are able to contact Superboy through their patrol car radios, and he responds to them from a secret room within the Kent household. While the pilot was put together well, and showed definite potential, it unfortunately did not get a series commitment. It would be more than twenty years before anyone explored the possibility of a Superboy series again.

Following the phenomenal worldwide success of the Alexander and Ilya Salkind's Superman films (*Superman* through *Superman III* and *Supergirl*), a gentleman named Dino Marino approached producer Alexander Salkind about bringing this adolescent version of Superman to life. Salkind's production company still retained the rights to the Superman family of characters, and after discussions with Marino, he warmed to the possibility of a weekly *Superboy* series. Salkind was on board, but there was one major snag in the plan.

According to Alexander's son, Ilya, ever since the end of production on *Santa Claus: The Movie* in 1985, the two "were not seeing eye-to-eye" and were not in a big hurry to work with one another again. Now the idea of a major TV series certainly appealed to them, so the father and son team came together and made a fixed deal. Ilya Salkind explained, "My father was an absolute wizard at raising money, but he was not a technical producer. Plus, he wouldn't fly. He wouldn't

Top left:
This advance promotional folder for television syndicators promised the first Super series in almost thirty years!



The young Superboy (John Haymes Newton) got his start fighting crime by protecting the skies over Siegelville, Florida.

go to the set and all that stuff, so he needed me. This was the beginning of '88. He called me and said, 'Look, there's this Superboy show, and Viacom is interested in doing it.' He was stuck because there was a clause in the Warner deal, the DC Comic deal that said any project that was based on the (Superman) family of heroes and villains had to be produced by Alexander and Ilya Salkind, so he was kind of stuck. Without me, it was very hard to do it because he was not hands-on, he was more the great moments of instincts and opinions, but he was not hands-on, following the thing from scratch. So we made an agreement – very different from the old times when we were partners."

"So I said, 'Okay, let's do *Superboy*,'" continued Salkind, "We agreed on the deal; I was going to be the executive producer, but without any kind of involvement on the financial side. For this basically I was just a hired gun and he had to make me an offer that I couldn't refuse *[laughs]*!" So it came to be that thirty years after *Adventures of Superman* concluded and a full fifty years after the first comic appearance of Superman, the character would again take flight in a weekly television show centered for the first time on Superboy.

Superboy was never intended to be a network show; it was always aimed at the syndicated market. This was mainly because Viacom had been on board as a distributor from the earliest discussions and that was their business. But there was another coincidental and very helpful reason to avoid a network situation, which Salkind explained. "Now, what was the advantage of having it syndicated? Oh, very important because we didn't have all these opinions—'Don't do this, do this, do that...' Of course we had DC Comics and Viacom, but Viacom was represented by first Mary James then Julia Pistor, and of course we were all in sync with the comic book guys who wrote a lot of shows."

Going the way of syndication meant only the Salkinds, DC and the actual day-to-day creators of the series would be involved in its development and direction. No outside network influences could force them to do something they were uncomfortable with, or for which they had not planned. The major drawbacks of course, were the financial stability and guaranteed location to air the series that come with a network deal would not be in place. With syndication, a lot of the initial funding and selling of the show to stations had to be done in-house.

But even then, *Superboy* was fortunate. "That was the interesting thing," continued Salkind. "At that point syndication was very hot. Michael Gerber, who is a very dear friend, was the head of acquisitions [at Viacom] and he's the one who, once Marino sort of warmed my father to that and I agreed, they got all excited and they made a fantastic presentation for the stations." At the time of *Superboy*'s development, there were no regularly-scheduled comic hero programs on television. It also didn't hurt, as Salkind mentioned, that the syndicated market was booming at the time due to the recent success of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Syndication was seen as a viable manner to distribute new programming, and stations across the nation were eagerly looking for the next hit property. With the Salkinds backing the show, and Viacom's impressive sales pitch, *Superboy* was guaranteed to generate hit numbers before it aired its first episode.

Newcomer John Haymes Newton was cast as Clark Kent/Superboy after a long search. Salkind remembered, "Well it was not that simple, I mean, you know he had to be Superboy. The first thought was it's got to be real, Superboy has to be perfectly comic-wise believable. It's the real stuff here, no camp, and then a lot of story." Since the storyline would be placed years before Clark Kent's journey to Metropolis and introduction to Lois Lane, Superboy's lead female character was Lana Lang.

Lang was portrayed by Stacy Haiduk, who had a couple of small roles in film and television before her stint on *Superboy*. Additional main characters included Clark's friend and co-worker at the university newspaper, T.J. White (nephew of *Daily Planet* editor, Perry White), played by James Calvert, and of course, recurring enemy, Lex Luthor, played by Scott Wells.

Alexander Salkind initially wanted to shoot the series in Czechoslovakia, but Ilya Salkind nixed the idea quickly, insisting *Superboy* be shot in the U.S. or Canada at the very least. After extensive scouting, series line producer, Robert Simmonds had suggested either Texas or Florida for the series with the ultimate decision to be made by Ilya Salkind. Salkind explained, "Texas was interesting. They had studios, but Disney was impressive, and it's good to be there because other things can happen. They were just opening their new studios in Orlando. It was the first show to break ground there, I think. Definitely we were the one that attracted attention." Salkind decided the new production would be headquartered in Florida to take advantage of his points, and then he moved to the U.S. to be on-hand for the production.

The *Superboy* production made no effort to hide where the stories took place. The main location for the action in early episodes was Shuster University (named for Superman co-creator, Joe Shuster), which was frequently referenced as being in Florida. While the Superboy character had no previous roots in Florida, Ilya Salkind did not see the series as being in continuity with either the comic or the film franchise. He explained, "It wasn't. I mean you can say, okay, that's poetic license; between before he says goodbye to Ma Kent and before [Pa Kent] dies, he might have been Superboy. But we really didn't, DC and I agreed, we really didn't get too crazy on that because it had been done before. They had changed Superman a couple of times before, they had added characters, so, we decided to base it in the eighties, late eighties and he went to college. You want to be logical in this most illogical universe of comic books, which is pretty mind-boggling if you start going into it; you can get headaches after a while. With the third dimensions and the duplications and that, in all of them. It's just incredible the amount of invention there is there."

"Now in TV what I first learned of course was that it's very different than films," Salkind added, "Because an executive producer does everything. Meaning he co-writes and sometimes writes himself, but then he works with the writers on all the stories and at the same time. This show was half an hour, so we had to prepare while we're shooting and while we're finishing. So basically, you're doing three shows a day. One show you're shooting, the other one you're preparing for the next shoot and the other one you're finished before you're finished. It was very interesting to me, because it was a fascinating school. I learned I had to be everywhere. The directors only come to direct; they don't cut, they don't cast, they don't do anything, they just direct." The decision of making the show a half-hour was made purely to keep things simple. Since many of the people creating the series had not worked on a weekly production before, it was decided that the half-hour length would be best for everyone involved.

Superboy was shot on tape, not film, in order to help with both the budget and ease of post-production for visual effects. But even with the use of tape, Salkind remembers that the individual episodes were not cheap to produce, "They were pretty expensive. I would say the funding was about a half a million dollars per episode, but we had things that were very expensive, like the flying. That was done by Bob Hartman who

The series' first Superboy (John Haymes Newton), along with Lana Lang (Stacy Haiduk).

Evildoers near Shuster University beware, Andy McAllister (Ilan Mitchell-Smith), Superboy (Gerard Christopher) and Lana Lang (Stacy Haiduk) have got you in their sights!

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did the Superman films. That's why the flying is pretty fantastic. If you look at the series you'll see we could already do tricks that were much easier than on film. On tape you can do different things that are much harder on film—wires, all that stuff. He was the best, he is the best."

The very beginning of *Superboy* was a little shaky, as Ilya Salkind admitted, "It was not even amateurish. They were just, frankly, not that great because it wasn't bigger than life. He was fighting Abe Vigoda... and it all took place on a very small scale, you know. Robberies, but it was not the superhero universe. After the second or third episode, Gerber said, 'Ilya, I got some letters from the stations and I want you to read them.' I said, 'Okay,' and the letters said, 'What the hell's going on? This is not what we were expecting. This show is a piece of trash, this Salkind is an imbecile...' All this stuff. I started saying, 'Wait a minute, what are we doing here?' Then I got much more involved by changing the stories." He continues, "If you start looking you'll see, after three, four it starts to kick. The first are not even that bad, they're just not the kind of... it wasn't what they were expecting. I mean he was going after little criminals, but thank God that stopped. It was bad quality."

Before the production had even reached its season halfway point of thirteen episodes, Salkind had listened to the voices of the viewers and was already hard at work changing the focus and style of the show. One of the most important additions he made to the crew was to hire comic book writers to create new scripts.

Mike Carlin recalled how he and Andy Helfer were brought on to write for *Superboy*, "I was editor of *Superman* at DC, pretty newly assigned. Andy Helfer was the previous Superman editor and this project came up during the writer's strike. But they hired a guy named Fred Freiberger to be the story editor in a deal with the Writer's Guild. Since they were new producers, they hadn't violated any of the Writer's Guild's rules, so they figured 'We'll let them slide.' So they start up the show, and Jenette Kahn and Paul Levitz had me and Andy as [consultants] for the show. We worked on it from the beginning. They bought a whole bunch of scripts, and as the show was playing, they saw some of it wasn't working so well, and they tossed a whole bunch of scripts. They needed something written really fast, and they asked me and Andy to write an episode. [It] was really popular, [what] the viewers wanted to see. So they let me and Andy do some more." The first of these efforts from the team of Mike Carlin and Andy Hefler, was a two-part story entitled "The Alien Solution" which aired as the series' ninth and tenth episodes. The ratings remained strong into the beginning

of 1989 and *Superboy* was extended to a full twenty-six-episode season.

"So then I got into the things where we started creating aliens," continued Salkind, "I mean, there was a lot of stuff there after episode three I would say, episode four. Then on the second thirteen, I added Cary Bates, who of course was a comic genius, and they really started to rock 'n' roll because it got better and better and better with Bizarro and Mxyzptlk." Carlin added, "In the beginning there was probably more conflict than anything, because we wanted to see the show reflect a more comic book action/adventure show. As time went along for the second half of the first season, they actually hired Cary Bates to work in Florida with Fred Freiberger, so he was the first one that they put on the table that had a history of comic book stuff. Then guys like Denny O'Neil and [J.M.] DeMatteis came along later. Those are, I think, the episodes that are the closest to what people like in comics. One of the guys who was a story editor in the last two seasons, Stan Berkowitz, has gone on to do tons of work with the Warner Brothers animation studio, so he's a very good comic book guy, as well."

By the end of its first season, *Superboy* was a very popular show. But if Salkind hadn't taken some early criticisms by fans to heart and opted for more of a comic book feel, it may not have had a chance to grow. With his influence, the quality of the production improved and *Superboy* continued to be heavily promoted across the nation. Salkind added, "Viacom did a fantastic promotional job, and it had a fantastic rating, a five-eight, which was unbelievable in those days. Today if you get a two you're a genius—oh my God, you're picked up, you're a hero. It was doing five-eight, five-nine. Of course, I'd learned by then how the ratings work and all that. I said 'Wow, man, this is a hit!'"

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Superboy's everyday guise, Clark Kent (Gerard Christopher) from season three.

With the start of season two, *Superboy* underwent a series of dramatic changes, both in front of the camera and behind the scenes. The most visible and important change in front of the camera came in the form of a new lead actor and nearly complete cast overhaul. Salkind explained the changeover, "I did something that apparently had never been done, when I decided to change John because he was becoming complicated. But it has—everything has been done somehow. There, we had a very good casting director, which was Helen Jacoby; she's one of the biggest in Florida, and she liaised with somebody in LA and all that. I saw a bunch of guys and, of course, Gerard walked in and I mean, man, I saw immediately that's the guy that looked the closest and he had a very strong personality and so on, but can he act? We tested him in Orlando, I actually directed that test. We showed it to Viacom, they loved it and that was it."

Salkind continued about the personnel changes for season two, "I was there [in Orlando] working sixteen hours a day. As I said, you shoot one, you prepare one, you deliver one at the same time. So it was crazy. I said, 'Well, if I change Superboy, I might as well change two other actors.' Because the guy who played Lex Luthor, Scott Wells, was very good-looking, was a nice guy, but he was complicated. I had him work with a coach, of course, he would go back and forth for a couple of days, and he was much better in the last episode, the one where he loses his hair which is the basis of the comic books. That's why he hates Superboy was because of an accident. He thinks Superboy made him lose his hair, it can't grow back again. So he was much better there, but still not up to par with what Lex Luthor was going to become. By then I had Cary Bates and, of course, I was completely in it and the comic book guys were writing scripts with us and we were really going to the whole universe of the comic books. We would completely change Lex Luthor. He's going to grow five inches, he's going to re-do his face, he's going to take another body, and then I took this fantastic actor, Sherman Howard, who just for me, today is still the best Luthor of all of them. I'm telling you and I'm not the only one who says that. He was fantastic and it worked!"

Salkind continued, "I said, 'Okay, well this is a unique coup where I could change Superboy,' [and] replace Jim Calvert who was the sidekick. We always wanted to have that sidekick; he's a great actor, but the point is he was a little too lively, he didn't have enough edge, I think, and we could have written him with more edge. I wanted something more, a little more flashy perhaps, so I came up with Ilan Mitchell-Smith who'd done *Weird Science*, so was already a kind of star."

With the on-screen personalities getting a nearly complete makeover, it was only right that the visual effects on *Superboy* should also be improved upon. Salkind explained, "Yes, because first of all, I got the hang of it. I got Joe Rabin, one of the directors, and he was very good at post. I put him in charge of supervising all the effects so I had one guy to report, so I didn't have to worry about everybody. He would be on their

back, and it got better, and of course everybody got more relaxed and became a really nice family." With one person to direct the visuals and check in with Salkind, it made everyone's jobs much easier. The effects were handled under a tighter degree of supervision which allowed the effects department and Salkind more time to do their jobs better.

Salkind continued about the final major change after season one, "Another thing that happened is we changed studios. At Disney, we were in a bungalow and it was getting very tight in the space. So I asked them if I could have an office for me with my own separation. Because in films and TV everybody gossips and talks and it's crazy, so it's good to be able to be a little isolated, especially in script dealings and stuff like that. They didn't want to do it. At the same time Tom Pollock, who was our ex-lawyer, became chairman of Universal and they were building Universal Florida. I called him, this is after we agreed on Gerard and all that, I said, 'Tom, I might move the series—I might move the series to Universal, if you can build a floor for us and a special location and a stage, and of course give us a great price.' So he called the director (Rob Weisz), a nice guy, and of course, we got a better deal, no question about it, and they built us a floor to specifications, which was very nice. So we moved and of course Disney was not that happy. But the fact is that at Universal, it was bigger stages, so that's also why stuff got better in terms of production values."

"So the second season, not only did we change three actors, and kept Stacy, of course, she was dynamite, but I had to convince Viacom that I was going to replace three actors out of four on a successful series," continued Salkind. "They thought I was insane, because when it's working, why would you tinker, right? The new shows started with a two-parter, the second season with Gerard and Sherman Howard and Ilan Mitchell-Smith. Then the reviews really became glowing and the ratings went even a little more, but they were very high already. *[laughs]* It got to be number ten, it was like fourteen, fifteen, it got to be number ten at that time, so it really became then much more exciting."

The opening episode of season two explained Clark's sidekick T.J. as having moved away to take a job as a photographer at his father's newspaper. Clark's new, and not totally welcomed, sidekick was fast-talking Andy McAllister (Ilan Mitchell-Smith), who had maneuvered his way to the room because he had heard Clark was a friend of Superboy's. Lex Luthor underwent major reconstructive surgery in order to impersonate the incredibly rich head of a major company and thereby continue in his quest to destroy Superboy.

Superboy officially changed its name to *The Adventures of Superboy* at the beginning of season three, and continued along with many of the best-remembered and strongest episodes of the series. This was in no small part due to the inclusion of familiar, costumed super villains—one major area where *Superboy* excelled against other comic book series adaptations. Villains like Metallo (played by actor Michael Callan), Bizarro (played by Barry Meyers) and the previously-mentioned Mr. Mxyzptlk (played by Michael J. Pollard), who had been featured in the middle of the first season, made their first ever appearances in live-action, and they did not disappoint. The inclusion of these villains helped elevate *Superboy* to not only be a more attractive series for comic fans, but to give it a solid larger-than-life appeal for the average TV fan.

But the strength of *Superboy*'s ratings and its public appeal may have unintentionally led to its downfall. With ratings continuing to climb, Warner Bros. took more notice of the show and began exploring the possibility of creating their own primetime vehicle starring the Man of Steel. Salkind explained, "We had a hundred episodes. I think it was really good, and the ratings were respectable. And then what happened was the usual politics, where it became more complex because DC was becoming a little bit influenced by Warner and they wanted to do *Lois & Clark* and so it became more and more complicated with the approvals, so finally we just stopped."

Mike Carlin added his feelings about working on the series. "I thought it got better every season, it really did. The first season, I think, is overall very tame and low-key, and I don't think that that's what people want to see when a guy in blue tights and a cape is flying around. As the seasons went on, the stories got more focused. Frankly, because it was syndicated, it actually got the shot to get there. If it was on network TV it might have been cancelled while they were finding their way. We went down [to Orlando] a couple of times, which was just fun for me. I mean, I was pretty new at DC, and it really was an adventure."

In addition to the internal struggles of continuing with the series, Salkind had also begun prepwork on a *Superman V* feature film with Christopher Reeve, which unfortunately never came together. All of these combined pressures led to the Salkinds ending *Superboy* prematurely. Because of the way the production was essentially forced to shut down, and with the rights to their *Superboy* series still firmly in their control, the Salkinds ensured that no one would profit off of it. Ilya Salkind explained, "Then there was a very clever thing that was done. We blocked the show from all parties. We blocked the show from DC, from Paramount, Viacom and us, unless everybody agreed that it wouldn't be blocked. So the show was completely, originally seen only once, without a repeat." This counted for both domestic and international exposure. Once the final episodes ended airing, *Superboy* disappeared off TV for good. The only way it survived was through home recordings made by fans when it initially aired.

Eventually, all parties involved renegotiated the rights and agreed to give *Superboy* a new life on home video. In 2006, the first season of the program was officially offered to the public on DVD. Ilya Salkind concluded, "You know, after *Superman IV*, nobody was excited about Superman. *Superboy* started giving it back some success. The whole image of Superman, Superboy, Supergirl—everything. *Superboy* was easy, there's no question, aside from those first two, three episodes and those horrible letters. But it was real fun. And what I love about TV, you get the results every Monday."

Still a cheerleader, an aspiring athlete and under his father's thumb, *Smallville*'s main trio in more innocent times.

SMALLVILLE

What started out as an idea to explore the life of a young Bruce Wayne ended up changing focus to instead center on the adolescence of fellow hero-to-be, Clark Kent. Eventually titled *Smallville*, after the hometown of the Kent family, the series went on to become the longest continuously running comic-based TV production. While not a direct adaptation of any set title, *Smallville* very clearly owes its existence to the entire Superboy/Superman mythos. Many of the series' characters and elements had their roots in the comics, but they were drastically changed, mixed-up and altered to fit a new, unique version of how Clark Kent grew up to become the world's most famous hero.

On the surface, the vast amount of changes, new characters and alterations to the familiar story shouldn't have worked. With Superman having one of the world's best-known backstories, the creators of *Smallville* would have painted themselves into a corner had they not forgone the familiar history and taken the bold, daring steps they did. Their new directions allowed them to explore areas and situations never before covered in any of Clark Kent's previous adventures. *Smallville*'s creators took great care with their new decisions to make sure everything fit nicely within their own work, made sense and most importantly, kept the weekly storylines fresh and engaging.

Series creators Miles Millar and Alfred Gough had a history of working together as writers for both television and feature films. One of their first television projects was the dramatic *TimeCop* series, based on the earlier feature film. Their own feature work included projects like *Lethal Weapon* 4 and the

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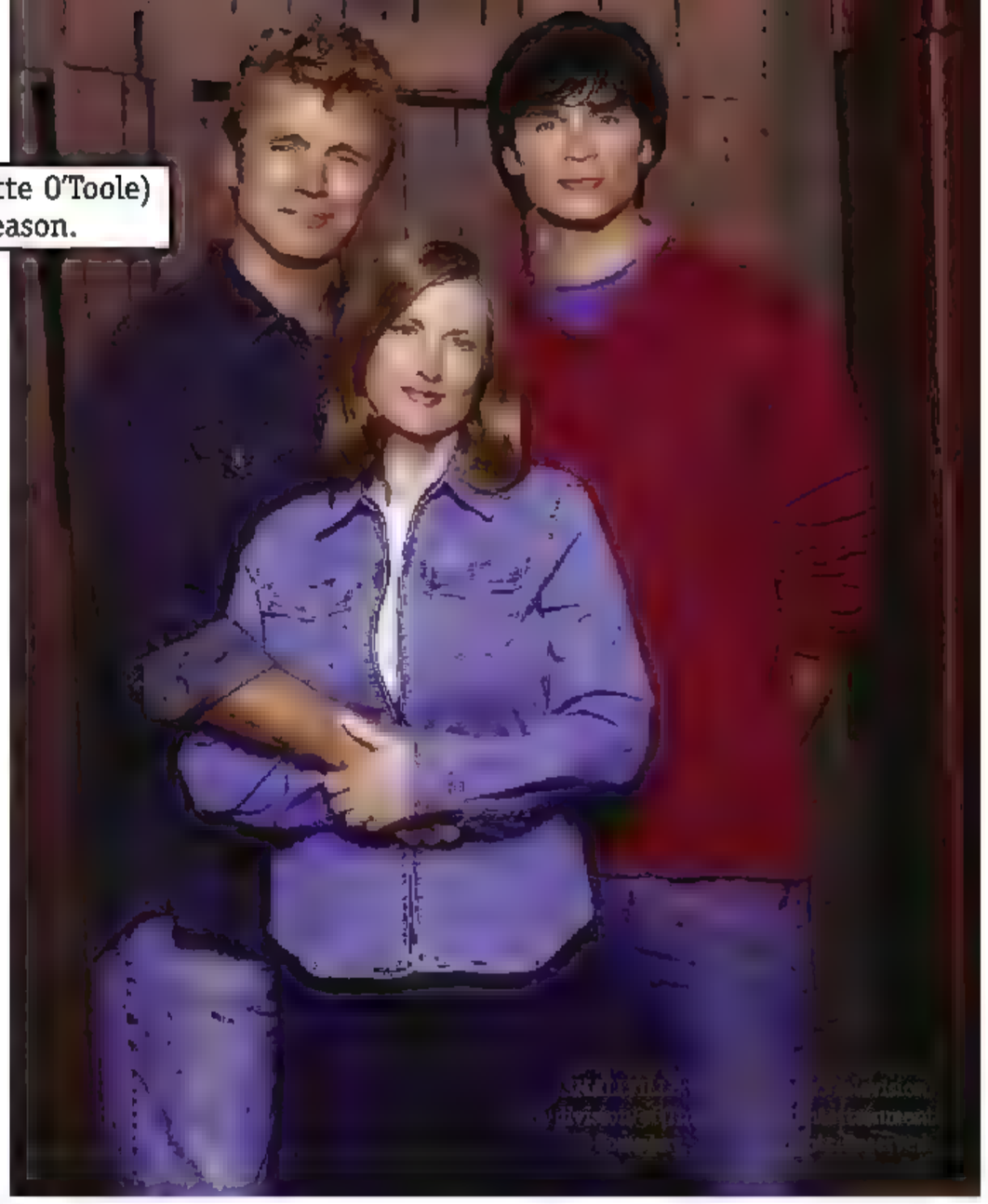
Jackie Chan/Owen Wilson action-comedy *Shanghai Noon*. The pair had delivered hits and written quality scripts, and their existing relationship with Warner Brothers allowed them the opportunity to pitch ideas and projects. When their newest pitch finally focused on Clark Kent, Warner Brothers gave the team the go-ahead and a series deal.

Millar and Gough would end up taking on the majority of the series' scripts themselves, but they also surrounded themselves with a stable of impressive young writers. Many made names for themselves for the first time on *Smallville*. These included Michael Green, Doris Egan (who had written for FOX's *Dark Angel*), Greg Walker (FOX's *The X-Files*) and Mark Verheiden. Verheiden wrote for the *TimeCop* TV series with Millar and Gough; he also had an extensive list of comic book credits. Of the initial batch of writers, he remained with *Smallville* the longest, eventually serving as a series producer before leaving in 2004.

In the beginning, the series had a definite monster-of-the-week feel to it. The appearance of so many specially powered individuals was explained by the Kryptonite fragments (initially called "meteor rocks," before anyone was aware of Krypton) that saturated the Smallville area. The fragments came from a meteor storm that hit the area seventeen years prior. This was the same storm that brought the young Kal-El to Earth. The meteor rocks had a bad habit of mutating humans and giving them bizarre powers. But the week-to-week pattern was quickly rectified to include longer story arcs for each season. Additional writers were hired for the second year, including, among others, Jeph Loeb. Loeb had made a name for himself in features, having co-written diverse scripts like the comedy *Teen Wolf* and

Clark Kent's close friend and confidant, reporter Chloe Sullivan (Allison Mack), a character created for the series.



Jonathan Kent (John Schneider), Martha Kent (Annette O'Toole) and Clark Kent (Tom Welling) from *Smallville*'s first season.

the action film *Commando*. For comic books he penned the Batman series *The Long Halloween* (1996) and *Dark Victory* (1999). Another title he wrote in 1998 called *Superman for All Seasons* was a major reason *Smallville* came to be.

Jeph Loeb explained how he was brought on to *Smallville*'s production. "Al Gough and Miles Millar have always been very generous by saying that my graphic novel, *Superman for All Seasons*, was the inspiration for the show. As such, they had me look at the pilot script and the pilot itself very early on. I was blown away at their take, which is fantastic. They asked if I'd come on, but I was working on *Buffy* [*the Vampire Slayer*] at the time and couldn't. Near the end of season one they asked again and I jumped. I loved the show."

"The directive at the beginning of the series was that we would never see Superboy fly, or in his familiar costume. The show would focus on Clark and his life," Loeb continued. "It was cool. The show was about *Clark*; it wasn't about Superman. There was no Superman. There were no superheroes. It wasn't quite the real world—I mean, who gets along with their parents *[laughs]*? But it also wasn't a world with capes and tights... yet. I loved the stories, but I wrote *Superman for All Seasons* for those exact reasons. Once he became Superman, Clark became a disguise. When he's growing up, *that's* the character."

As in any series, the cast would be a major key to its success. Relative newcomer Tom Welling was chosen out of a huge casting call to play the young Clark Kent. Tall, athletic and handsome, Welling also had the crucial combination of being insightful, friendly and having the ability to convey the sense that he knew more than he was letting on, all important traits for the character of Clark Kent. Clark's journey would show just how his personality was shaped as a young man, and Welling had to be able to capture the right balance of humor, strong will, the willingness to learn from his mistakes and knowing how and when to use the powers that made him special. Viewers would have quickly turned against a Clark that was a bully, or conversely, one that allowed himself to be a punching bag.

Since they knew his origins and his powers, Clark's parents endeavored to bring him up with a strong set of morals and good sense. Because of this, Clark constantly battled with himself over decisions on how he should do things. He knew full well that with his powers he could do just about anything he wanted, but was also aware he couldn't tell anyone about his abilities. With Welling's careful portrayal, Clark was a believable character with whom viewers could always feel empathy and struggle along with as he made his choices.

Kristen Kreuk was chosen to play the beautiful Lana Lang, Clark's seemingly unobtainable high school crush. Just before *Smallville* started, Canadian-born Kreuk was becoming famous in her homeland for playing the character Laurel Yeung on the teenage drama series *Edgemont*. She continued acting on both series through 2003, when *Edgemont* ended and she was free to concentrate on *Smallville*. Lang was an orphan, her parents having been killed during the meteor storm that initially brought Clark to Earth.

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While Clark and Lana shared feelings for one another, their relationship was always complicated. Mostly it came down to Lana being unable to trust Clark. She knew he was hiding secrets and felt she could never fully trust him until he was comfortable enough to tell her everything. But he didn't want to reveal his powers or origin to her for fear that she couldn't handle it, or to tell her that he was the indirect cause of her parents' deaths. After a series of failed relationships, including a few early attempts to be with Clark, Lana married Lex Luthor. But she soon left the tycoon to finally return to Clark. Kreuk ended her time on *Smallville* after seven full seasons.

Michael Rosenbaum played Lex Luthor, the son of rich businessman Lionel Luthor (played to the hilt by John Glover). Lex lived in Smallville, although he was not well loved by the town's population. He was seen as a spoiled rich kid. He and his father's Luthor Corp. were the cause of much misery in the area. Nevertheless, he became close friends with Clark and the Kent family when Clark rescued him after a car accident. Due to the

The main cast from the first season of *Smallville*.

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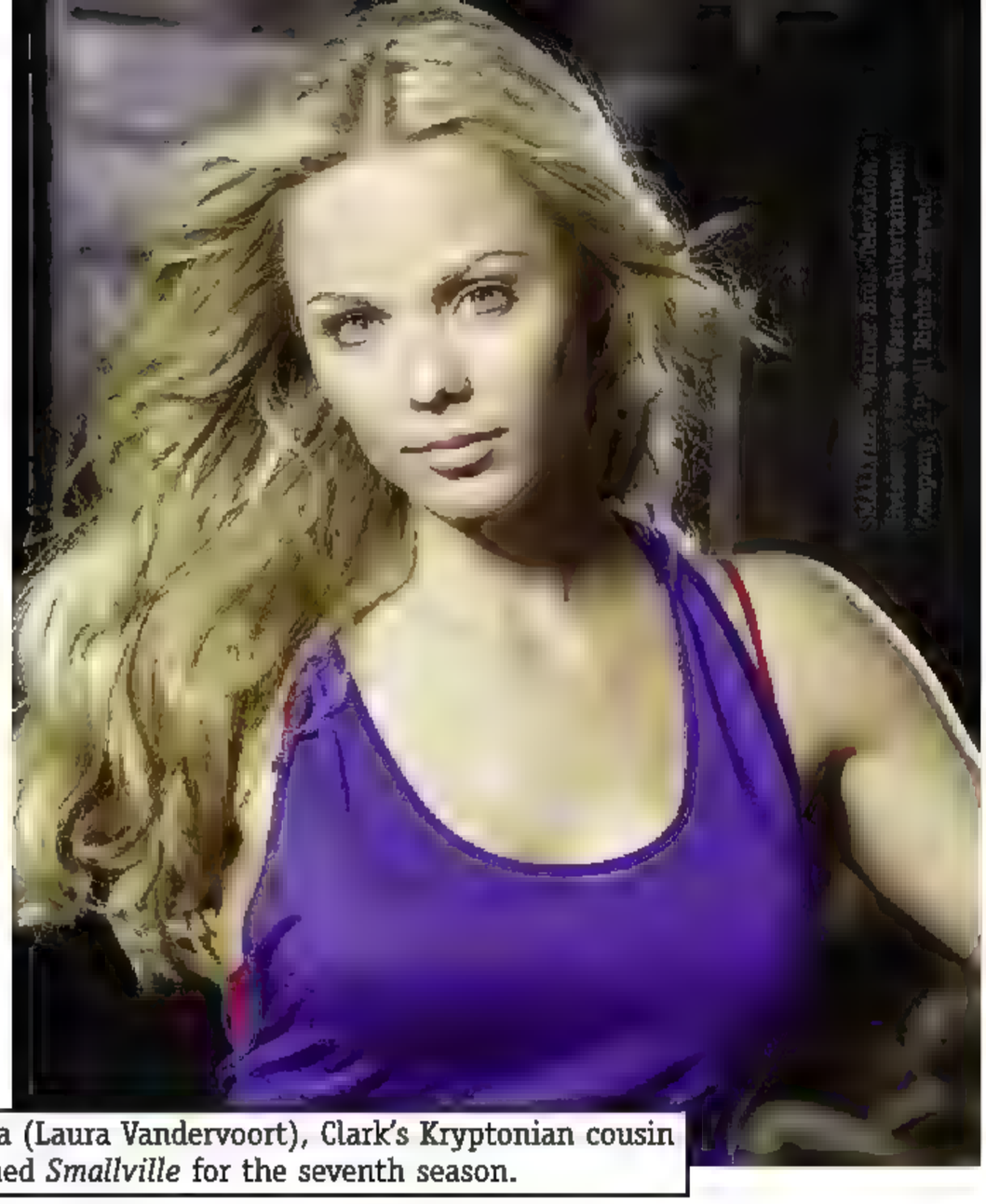
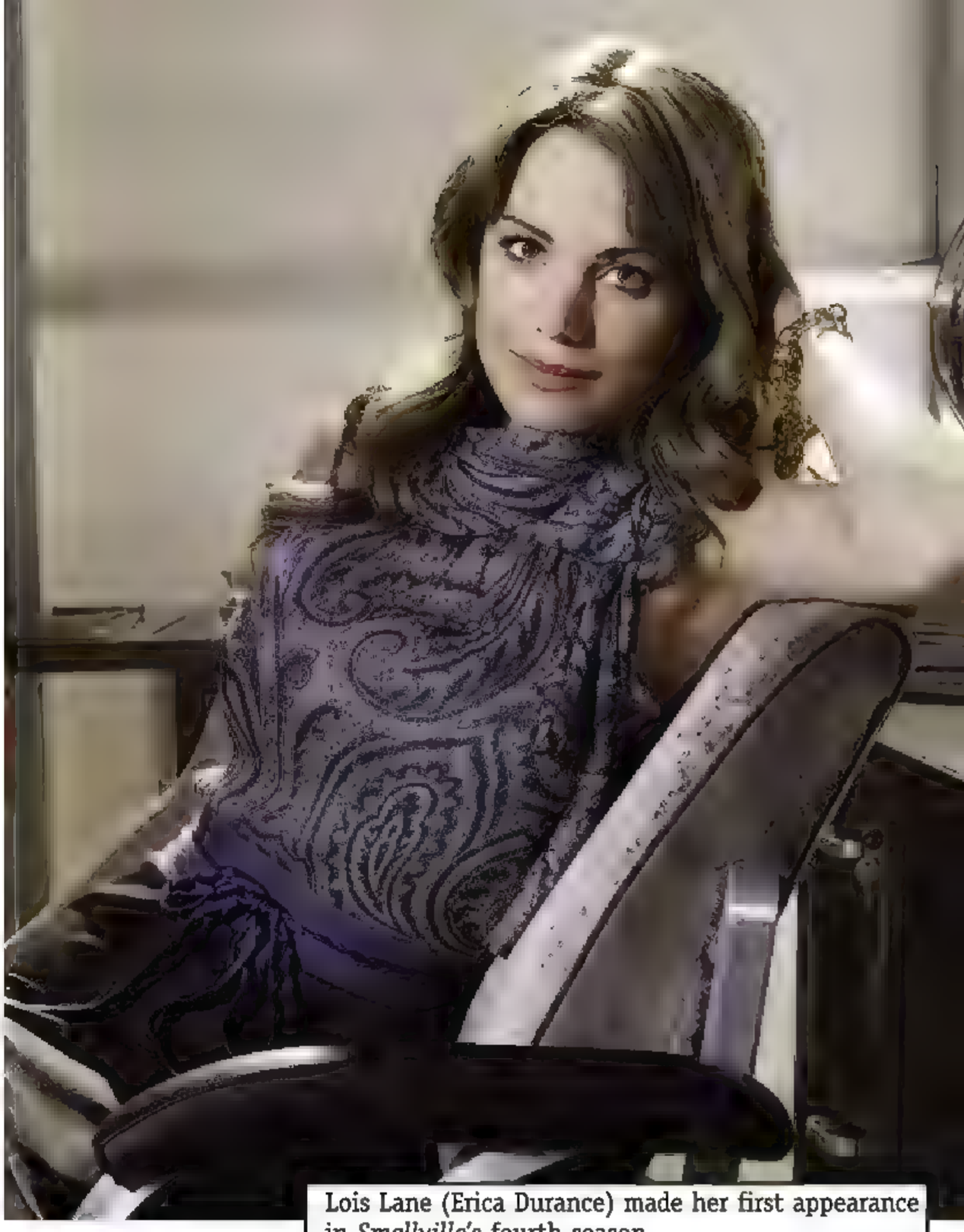


Kara (Laura Vandervoort), Clark's Kryptonian cousin joined *Smallville* for the seventh season.

circumstances of the accident—Clark was struck hard by Lex's car before going over a bridge and into the water below—Lex became suspicious of how Clark could have survived unharmed and began a years-long investigation into his past. Because of Lex's numerous lies about halting his prying into Clark's past, as well as their rivalry for the affections of Lana, the two lost their once-close friendship and fulfilled their character's traditional roles of becoming bitter enemies. Rosenbaum also left *Smallville* at the end of its seventh season.

Alison Mack played Clark's close friend and fellow explorer of the bizarre news stories around Smallville, Chloe Sullivan. Chloe was a character created specifically for *Smallville*, and for a while it seemed as if she was going to fill the Lois Lane role. A smart, no-nonsense character, Chloe had a secret crush on Clark for much of their time together. She was also one of the few people outside the Kent family that learned about his secret powers. Once she did, she realized she and Clark could team up to help the people of Smallville and, ultimately, Metropolis. Chloe's path led from being head of her high school newspaper to gaining a writer's position at the *Daily Planet*. While fans of *Smallville* quite naturally saw Chloe as a replacement for Lois Lane, it was not the intention of the show's creators to keep her in that role.

Indeed, as the show progressed, Lois Lane was finally introduced at the beginning of season four. Lane was played by Erica Durance, who had built a body of work in films and



Lois Lane (Erica Durance) made her first appearance in *Smallville*'s fourth season.

television, including guest appearances in *Stargate SG-1*, *Andromeda* and *Tru Calling* before her time on *Smallville*. Lane came to Smallville to personally investigate the events that led to the apparent murder/disappearance of her cousin Chloe in the cliffhanger ending to season three. Although she was there to explore the mysterious circumstances, Lane had zero interest in becoming an investigative reporter. When she met Clark, the two immediately began butting heads. She saw him as a simple backwoods/farmboy type, and even began referring to him as "Smallville." After a few more appearances, she eventually came to live in the small town at the Kent family farm—much to the disappointment of Clark.

Jeph Loeb weighed in on the writers' thoughts on the Chloe/Lois puzzle, "It was all planned out to bring Lois in later. Allison Mack made Chloe her own—and she is an entirely original character from out of Al and Miles' head. Lois had to be rethought, and I had a great deal to do with that because I love that character. Erica Durance's performance is one of the highlights of the show. She's the greatest."

The driving force for the first six years of *Smallville* was the love triangle between Clark Kent (Tom Welling), Lana Lang (Kristen Kreuk) and Lex Luthor (Michael Rosenbaum).

Through *Smallville's* run, many characters from the DC Comics Universe came to life for the first time, like The Green Arrow (actor Justin Hartley).

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Playing Clark's adoptive parents were John Schneider (*The Dukes of Hazzard*) as Jonathan Kent and Annette O'Toole as Martha Kent. A prolific actress, O'Toole had earlier played the role of Lana Lang in the 1983 feature *Superman III*. John Schneider departed *Smallville* in the series' one-hundredth episode when his character was killed. O'Toole remained with the series through its sixth season when her character left to pursue a political career.

One of the other major first season cast members to make a surprise departure in season three was Sam Jones, who played Pete Ross. Pete was one of the few close friends Clark had in the early years and before Chloe found out, he was also the only person outside the Kent family in Smallville that knew about Clark's special powers. Jeph Loeb discussed losing Pete, "We just felt the character had run its course and it allowed for Lois to enter the picture. It was a tough trade because we all liked Pete—and Sam Jones' performance was wonderful—but things have to change." Lana Lang also had a series of short-term boyfriends, including high school quarterback Whitney, played by Eric Johnson, and the manipulative Jason Teague, played by Jensen Ackles. Loeb discussed their departures, citing the same reason. "Whitney had to go. Jason had to go. Change is really good for a serialized (as much as it was or wasn't) show."

One major *Smallville* attraction was its willingness to feature well-known comic characters. Many like Cyborg, Green Arrow, Aquaman, Dr. Fate, Bizarro, Brainiac and Stargirl had their live-action debuts on *Smallville,* while others like Kara (later Supergirl), Black Canary, Hawkman and General Zod were given a greater chance to develop as living characters. A young, delinquent Bart Allen even turned up a few times as a prototype Flash, which provided Clark the opportunity to help straighten out the boy's life.

The series was also eager to cast guest-stars from previous live-action DC productions. A number of stars from the Superman films have shown up in *Smallville,* in both one-shot and recurring roles. In his last on-screen credit, the late

Christopher Reeve, The Man of Steel himself, appeared for a couple episodes as scientist Virgil Swann, who figured out Clark's origins, contacted him to reveal his true name of Kal-El, and started him down the path of his true destiny. Margot Kidder (Lois Lane) was on-hand as Dr. Swann's assistant. The original Zod, Terrence Stamp, frequently provided the voice of Clark's true father Jor-El. Helen Slater (Supergirl) played Clark's true mother Lara-El in a couple Season 7 episodes and finally, Marc McClure (Jimmy Olsen) appeared in one episode as Dax-Ur, the Kryptonian creator of Brainiac. To date, the only television star with a Superman connection to guest on *Smallville* has been *Lois & Clark*'s Dean Cain, television's second live-action Superman, who played the role of Dr. Knox in the Season 7 episode, "Cure." Another high-profile guest star was Lynda Carter, TV's famous Wonder Woman, who played Chloe Sullivan's mother, Moira. Few other series have attempted to honor previous productions quite like *Smallville* has. The attention to the past has provided a lot of interest to the show, as well as a greater level of enjoyment for longtime fans.

writer's room and other aspects of the production had to take precedent. And I agreed with that." Loeb sums up his time on *Smallville*, "Mostly we had a blast. Great, great times. I left for personal reasons, but I stay in touch. I speak to one or more of those writers every day. That's how close we bonded. There are people on that show I will be friends with for the rest of my life. And in the end, that's what matters."

The series has progressed greatly over its time on the air, with perhaps its most significant change coming at the end of the seventh season when series creators and show runners Gough and Millar left. The new production crew headed by Brian Peterson, Kelly Souders, Todd Slavkin and Darren Swimmer have taken the show in new directions in their two seasons hence, but they have kept true to the series' main goal of keeping their main character out of his familiar costume and not allowing him to fly under normal circumstances. *Smallville* has become a different show under the new guidance, but it has lot none of its appeal.

Aquaman made a few appearances in *Smallville* under the name Arthur Curry, as portrayed by Alan Ritchson.

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Jeph Loeb continued with *Smallville* through the fourth season: "I wanted to do (so did everyone) young Bruce Wayne. We never got there." Adds Loeb, "There was a great pitch for young Oliver Queen. It's just Robin Hood... Archery is very visual. A *lot* of what they got to do in season five I had wanted to do—c'mon! Kryptonian battles, Lex and Lana—Brainiac! The greatest stuff ever. I would have liked to have written more," he continues, "but it quickly became apparent that my value to the

Incredibly popular, *The Greatest American Hero* scored a *TV Guide* cover early in its run.

The dynamic and interplay between the three leads was a big reason for the series' success, which ran on ABC from 1981 to 1983.

Three:

THE GREATEST AMERICAN HERO

Have no fear USA, the Greatest American Hero (William Katt) is here!

We dare you to talk to anyone about *The Greatest American Hero* without having someone singing you back a few lines from its classic theme song, unofficially christened by everyone as "Believe It or Not". The full official title is "Theme From 'Greatest American Hero'" (Believe It Or Not). Yes this particular hero doesn't have roots in the funnies but it is nonetheless a complete breath of fresh air that served as a deconstruction in the preconception that the general public had about superheroes. Most audiences had never seen a superhero that was as fallible and imperfect as they were. This particular hero was more than just another well proportioned, immortal, invulnerable, intelligent, and powerful costumed being, but rather just a mere ordinary Joe. This production offered viewers more than just comedy, fantasy, adventure or whatnot—it was all of that and extremely entertaining as well. Although it was on network television for a relatively short time, it was very influential and well remembered by a generation that was craving for new heroes.

COMICRAFT

In 1980, the team of Marcy Carsey and Tom Werner were the head of creative development for the ABC Network. During a meeting with Stephen J. Cannell, to discuss new projects, they suggested that he create a superhero show. But there was one problem—he had never been attracted to the superhero genre or comic books. "In my career as a writer," Cannell remembers, "I'd never done that. I wasn't really drawn to it. I didn't read a lot of *Superman* comic books when I was a little kid. I wasn't drawn to superheroes, and the reason I wasn't drawn to them was because except for generally one flaw, like Kryptonite, they don't have any flaws. If you look at my writing and the shows I've created over the years from *Rockford* to the *A-Team* to almost all the shows, *The Commish*—it's the flaws about these characters that make them interesting to me as a writer. But I've learned that when somebody tells you they'd like you do to something, not to say 'no'—in the meeting. But to say, 'Let me think about it and I'll get back to you.' The reason for that is sometimes you could say 'no' to something that actually you'd really enjoy doing."

Once in his office, the legendary writer-producer and his staff huddled together brainstorming ideas without much success. Then he had an idea that served as an epiphany: "I wonder what it would be like to be a superhero?" With that novel notion came a cluster of ideas. Stephen recalled, "What would happen if I was a superhero, Stephen Cannell? With the insanity of a spaceship coming down and giving me a suit and everything! What would it do to my life? Here I've got network TV shows on the air, I'm an up and coming guy around town... All of a sudden I've got to put on this little spandex outfit with jockey shorts and a cape and I've got to run around. What the hell would that do? The first time I got caught out in public I could say I'm going to Bill's costume party and my car broke down. But the second time, I'm in trouble, you know? What happens when my wife catches me in it twice? If I ever try to explain what it really is, is she going to have me committed?' So that all of a sudden started to feel really funny to me."

The writer continued, "[So] I went back to Marcy and Tom and I said, 'I'll tell you what, I'll do this if the powers can be in the suit and not in the guy. I don't want the guy to be from a distant star... I want the powers to be in the suit. When he takes the suit off, he's just you and me. I think that makes him vulnerable and I want him to have this very ordinary kind of life.' A schoolteacher was what I chose, teaching learning disabled children who are basically disciplinary problems. Now he gets this suit and everything is turned upside-down by it and therein lays the comedy. As I was going along and putting the project together as a writer, I'm thinking, 'Okay, he needs a partner, he needs another guy.' Who should it be? Well if he's a high school teacher he won't know how to get a case. He has no access to crime or to criminal things, so I'm going to give him this kind of Reaganesque federal agent. He's so conservative that he makes your teeth ache. Ralph [the hero] on the other hand is this guy who all he wants to do is save the whales, stuff like that. So there's instantly an *Odd Couple* thing going on between the two of them. So that's what I did and the result is *The Greatest American Hero*. I intentionally had him lose the instruction books where he wouldn't have complete power over the suit, and it was more of a comedy I think than it was a drama. As a matter of fact, it got nominated for best TV show the first two years it was on the air and both times it was nominated for best comedy, even though it was an hour."

With the network's immediate approval, Stephen searched for a skilled actor who could instantly convey a friendly rapport with the public for his superhero lead. While looking for a leading man, Cannell came across a photo of actor William Katt in his viewfinder and immediately visualized his superhero coming to life. When the actor's agent forwarded him the pilot's script, Katt was starring on Broadway in *Bon Jour Le Bon Jour*. The last thing on Katt's mind was working in the medium of television; he was more than content exploring his acting craft in theatre and features.

"I told Michael Black, who was my agent at the time," said Katt, "I'm really not interested, but I'll take a look at it." He sent me the scripts and I read it and I must admit, I thought it was a very, very fun script. It made me laugh out loud. And then the offer came in and it was a significant

The Greatest American Hero's principal cast; Pam Davidson (Connie Sellecca), Ralph Hinkley (William Katt) and Bill Maxwell (Robert Culp).

Ever the reluctant odd couple, FBI agent Bill Maxwell (Robert Culp) and Ralph Hinkley (William Katt) must work together to fight crime.

amount of money. And my agent assured me, before I called him back, I said, 'Well, Michael, I'm not interested, but what do you think is the read on this? The money wouldn't be bad.' And he said, 'Well, Bill, you know, most of these things, you do the pilot and it never gets on the air, or a better scenario is it gets on the air and you do one and you do two or three and then they cancel.' I said, 'Well, in that case, how about let's go to the next step.'" So Steve flew out to New York and met with me, and we had dinner, and he was a very, very nice fellow, and at that point I agreed to do it. And then Steve, the day I finished [the play], which I think was a Sunday evening or Sunday afternoon, they put me on a plane and flew me into Los Angeles."

With William Katt as the lead, they now had an actor with all-American good looks and, more importantly, the good-hearted persona needed to connect with audiences in the part of Ralph Hinkley. Robert Culp, one of Cannell's favorite actors, was handpicked to play Bill Maxwell, the antsy and manipulative FBI agent who befriends Katt's character. Completing the main cast was the lovely Connie Sellecca as Ralph's devoted girlfriend Pam, who would often be the wiser buffer between Ralph's idealistic ways and Maxwell's volatile nature. In some ways, she was the voice of reason between the *Odd Couple*-like relationship of the two male leads.

The one thing that you couldn't do with this show was lump it with the rest of the light and fluffy sitcom-type standards of that television era. In this superhero show you had all hallmarks that one would come to expect from any Stephen Cannell show: colorful characterizations, strong plot-driven stories and a wicked sense of humor. Perhaps the niftiest element was the fact that you had a superhero more content just being an ordinary man in an absurd situation. A hero who didn't want his powers and cursed the day he got them but only used his gift because his integrity led him to use it for good deeds.

Like his character, William Katt shared the same contempt towards wearing his costume. No acting was ever really required to demonstrate how much the actor and his character despised their heroic guise. "When I went to myself in the pilot and I said, 'Hi, Fella,' in a way that I dislike myself in that red suit, I mean, that's me." Katt adamantly stated, "I hated it. I mean, I hated putting that costume on. I loved the work, I loved the people, but I did not like wearing that red suit."

Cannell and his studio were able to secure nearly two million dollars to cover the license fee for the pilot. The ABC network's biggest concern for the production was if the filmmakers were going to achieve satisfying flight sequences without spending the millions that the *Superman* film producers spent putting their hero in flight. As the producer pondered the dilemma at hand, Rod Holcomb, the pilot's director, finally proposed, "Look, if the first time we fly him we knock their socks off, then every flight after that they'll probably cut us some slack because they will have bought into it," Stephen recalled. That decision would prove invaluable and cost effective as the production strove to make the initial filming of the hero's flight top notch, and by cutting the footage wisely in editing, the filmmakers really didn't allow

the viewer's eye to linger too much on the special effect. The network brasses cheered when they saw the results of the flight sequences. It was at this point that Cannell was 100% confident that his show would be picked up.

The filmmakers succeeded in getting the Ralph Hinkley character off the ground, but flying wasn't exactly a comfortable experience for the actor playing the hero. "We didn't have computer animation," Katt stated, "and the first season, for the pilot and for the first season, I spent almost two weeks on a giant bluescreen set at Paramount up on cables flying from one end of the sound stage to the other. And I remember one instance where I'm up thirty feet in the air and one of the wires attached to my hip broke, and I'm spinning around thirty feet up in the air above this concrete. It was frightening. Another time the machine that ratchets you from one end to the other, they couldn't stop it in time and I went flying into the wall at the other end of the sound stage. There were no serious injuries resulted, but that was difficult, and I—when Bob (Culp) and Connie (Sellecca) would have time off and the rest of the crew would have some downtime, I'd be with a special unit shooting bluescreen. So I never had any time off. I mean, I was working 16-hour days, all the time. I was exhausted. And then the company—if they could have had me doing it, they would have had me opening Zody stores in that red suit! They were putting me in that red suit all the time."

Prior to the television premiere of the pilot on March 18, 1981, Warner Brothers, the parent company of DC Comics, filed a lawsuit against American Broadcasting Companies, Inc. (The ABC network) and Stephen J. Cannell on the basis of copyright infringement and unfair competition between the characters of Superman and Ralph Hinkley. The lawyers for ABC and Cannell were victorious in the initial trial and subsequent appeal to prove their character's uniqueness and differences. The remarkable verdict from this case would benefit all future superhero creations—on the big and small screen—by essentially demonstrating that all these heroes were a part of a growing genre, and that not all were cut from the same cloth.

"What happened was Warner Brothers had bought DC Comics and Warner Brothers was under the impression when they bought DC Comics, that they bought the entire superhero genre," said Stephen Cannell in sizing up the opposition against his heroic creation. "They absolutely believed it and were so adamant about it that they filed a restraining order, before my pilot goes on the air, against me and against ABC in New York in the Federal Court there—an injunction to prohibit us from airing the show. I had to go back to New York and we had to put a case together and everything, and it was fast-tracked because we had a premiere date and they were basically saying that we couldn't air the show. It would have broken my company. I had a little private studio and I used all my own money to cash-flow it, and it was early; this was the second show that Cannell studios had produced, and it ended up being the third largest studio in Hollywood, but at the time we were very small."

Hinkley or Hanley? A mild case of personality disorder was brought about when Ralph's last name was changed briefly to Hanley in the first season. The character's original last name unfortunately sounded just like the last name of the man who attempted to assassinate President Reagan.

Cannell added, "So I'm in New York and I'm testifying in this thing and it was lunacy. I remember one of their experts from DC Comics or Warner Brothers were saying, 'There was a thing in the pilot where a little kid tells him he's got to take three steps and jump, and that's the way superheroes can get airborne.' So we're in a big federal court in New York—and my attorneys were pretty bright, they led this guy right down the primrose lane—they said 'What do you mean three steps?' and he goes 'A three step jump.' So he goes 'can you demonstrate it?' And the guy goes 'Yeah,' and he gets out of his chair and he does three steps and a little hop right in the courtroom and he says, 'That's the way Superman always takes off. That's the patented three step jump which launches him.' Then of course he aired the Superman movie where he lifts straight off, no three steps and a jump, and he says, "So what's this?" *[laughs]* But I mean, that's the level of what we're arguing about, you know? They were basically trying to keep anything that was not Superman from being created. But the First Amendment gives you the right... and our show if anything was a parody, and parodies are always protected under the First Amendment. Actually, if you talk to any lawyer that deals with copyright law, *The Greatest American Hero* case is landmark law. It changed the way the law was perceived after that case."

After the show premiered, the assassination attempt on President Ronald Reagan by John Hinckley, Jr. on March 30, 1981 was too close too home for the television executives. The network quickly decided that the protagonist's last name sounded too much like the disgraced gunman. So during the first season, in several episodes, the character would be referred to as "Mr. H." or "Hanley" or by his first name, Ralph, through overdubs. With the network's consent, Cannell was able to restore the character's last name back for the second season after offering to sporadically use the "Hinkley" name.

The first year of episodes delivered all the heart, humor and action that its creator envisioned for audiences. The program naturally ingratiated itself with an enthusiastic generation of viewers and children that loved the program. The only thing that really hurt the program was the exit of the show's biggest supporters at ABC. Marcey Carsey and Tom Werner both left their network positions to start their independent production company. With the second season, the network now began to meddle with the persistent notes and directions concerning how they envisioned the show. ABC also began to toy with the show's time slot by constantly changing it, thus weakening the show by making it difficult for the program to build a regular audience.

"I loved the first season. It was great. Everything worked great. By and large I liked the bulk of the first season [which] I thought was fantastic." William Katt remembered, "Y'know, when I first did that show, Steve Cannell came to me, he said, 'Bill, I promise you are never going to run, chase monsters through the sewers.' And there it was, in the second season we were chasing a monster through the sewer. And I think that Steve felt bad about that, ultimately. I know that

Although lengthy auditions were held for the title character, creator Stephen Cannell always had Robert Culp in mind for Bill Maxwell.

in the last season, our third season, which was half a season, I believe, we did less of that, and again it became a better show."

Cannell expressed, "All of a sudden the new network guys come in and they want to do space aliens from outer space and they want to do comets coming to the Earth and the hero goes up and explodes the comets Superman-style, and I'm thinking this isn't what I agreed to do. Also, it's not what I promised my actors we'd do when I hired them. So I ended up fighting with the network for about a year and a half. Not to the benefit of the show by the way, because the network got frustrated and thought I wasn't being cooperative. There were a couple of times where I kind of went over the edge and gave them what they wanted, and both actors called me up and say, 'This isn't what we're supposed to be doing.' and they were absolutely right. I would have to say, 'I'm just so tired of fighting I kind of crumbled on this one, I won't do it again.' I remember one where the space shuttle comes down and it's got a space alien on board... And they were right to flag me on it, but I was just... after two years of 'every script is not right, every script is wrong and the network hates everything' it starts to get really fatiguing."

Ralph Hinkley (William Katt) has second and third thoughts about his role as a superhero.

Eventually ABC dropped the show in 1983 and still its popularity endured into syndication where it remained a constant on television sets for years to come. With its ever-growing circle of fans, Robert Culp brought the idea of resurrecting the show to Stephen Cannell, who in turn entertained the idea with Brandon Tartikoff, the head of NBC in the 1980s. Although Tartikoff would commission a pilot and reunite the original principal cast, he would never air it on television. The pilot was called *The Greatest American Heroine* and subsequent episodes would have followed the adventures of

Ralph Hinkley's female successor of the superpowered suit, played by actress Mary Ellen Stuart, and her mentor Bill Maxwell (Culp). Eventually the pilot was re-edited and added to the syndicated rotation as the proper finale to *The Greatest American Hero* saga.

For William Katt, the role of Ralph Hinkley became a bit of a burden because so many casting agents could not see him beyond his superhero role. Nowadays many popular actors play these roles without any repercussions; William Katt had to rely on his persistency to ensure the endurance of his career to the present day. Ironically, not long after the *Heroine* pilot was filmed, William was offered another chance of donning the suit one last time. "Brandon (Tartikoff) and Steve, they were going to put that show back on the air for two years," William remembered. "They guaranteed me a significant raise in salary and they guaranteed me two years on the air. And at the time I was already tied to the *Perry Mason* specials for NBC, that I was doing with Raymond Burr and my mom [actress Barbara Hale], and we were doing four television movies a year, and I thought that was enough for me. And I didn't really want to get back in that red suit full-time. I don't think anything's changed. When I think back on it people go, 'Oh, you were an idiot.' It could have gone to syndication and whatnot. But, you know, I did all right, I've been able to manage, and I don't regret anything."

William Katt shared a bit of his character's dislike for wearing *The Greatest American Hero* costume.

Today the timeless show is remembered as a benchmark in the history of superhero television shows as it endures on television, DVDs and in the hearts of fans. Perhaps no one has heard more the accolades of this series than the man who created it all those years ago. "People come to me all the time and say, 'Growing up, I loved that show,' or 'I loved this show, it meant so much to me,' and it's always nice to hear," Stephen Cannell said. "But I can't let that sustain me, because I wasn't doing it for those reasons. I was doing it because I love doing it."

Believe it or not:

The Story Behind the Classic Theme Song

as told by Stephen J. Cannell

"Mike Post wrote a good deal of the music for all the shows that I did. There were only one or two of my shows that he didn't do the music on out of forty-two or forty-three shows. He's my go-to guy and I thought given the tone of the pilot after I'd written the script that it needed to be a vocal. I very rarely go to Mike and say I need a vocal. I did it on a show that Steve Bochco and I did together called *Richie Brockleman, Private Eye*. I wanted a Beach Boys kind of sound on that and he gave me a vocal that was called 'School's Out' which was a high harmony just like the Beach Boys. On this one I knew I wanted a song and I don't know why, it just felt like it was the right thing. It was a song with lyrics and I went to him and I said, 'Read this script and give me a song with lyrics.' I probably would have gone for some lyric that said 'The Greatest American Hero' or something in the lyric, but he comes back to me with 'Believe It Or Not.' He comes into my office with a guitar and with Joey Scarbury who sung the hit and he said, 'I want you to hear this and tell me what you think,' and he played 'Believe It Or Not' for me. He played the guitar and Joey sang. When it was over I said, 'Mike, damn. That's a number one record.' He goes, 'Well I don't know whether it's a number one record or not, I think it's a pretty cute little song.' What do I know about music, I think it's a number one... well, it was a number one. It was the number one record of 1981. So there it is."

chapter 13

THE FLASH

The start of the new TV season in 1990 brought a new DC character life, this time in the form of The Flash. The first significant comic character to appear on one of the major networks since 1978, the crimson-suited hero was getting a chance to show off what made him so popular with comic readers. *The Flash* debuted on CBS on September 20, 1990 as a showcase series, right alongside the network's other new offerings and returning favorites.

The character was originally created by Gardner Fox and Harry Lampert for the first issue of *Flash Comics* in 1940. While The Flash was a popular comic character, he never really exploded enough to get attention in other media like radio or chapter play films. The comic series started strong, but within a few years its popularity waned and his title was cancelled. When The Flash was brought back as a completely new character in 1956, the hero gained new popularity and fan following. The new Flash was created when a police forensics scientist named Barry Allen is covered in multiple chemicals after a lightning bolt crashed through his laboratory window. Following the accident, Allen discovers he is able to move incredibly fast. From that moment, he becomes the red-suited speedster. It would take another twenty-plus years before the character saw his first live-action television appearance in the two NBC *Legends of the Superheroes* specials. But he was part of an ensemble cast in those productions and was never really given any real spotlight moments. Yet another twelve years passed before The Flash got his chance to star in his own program.

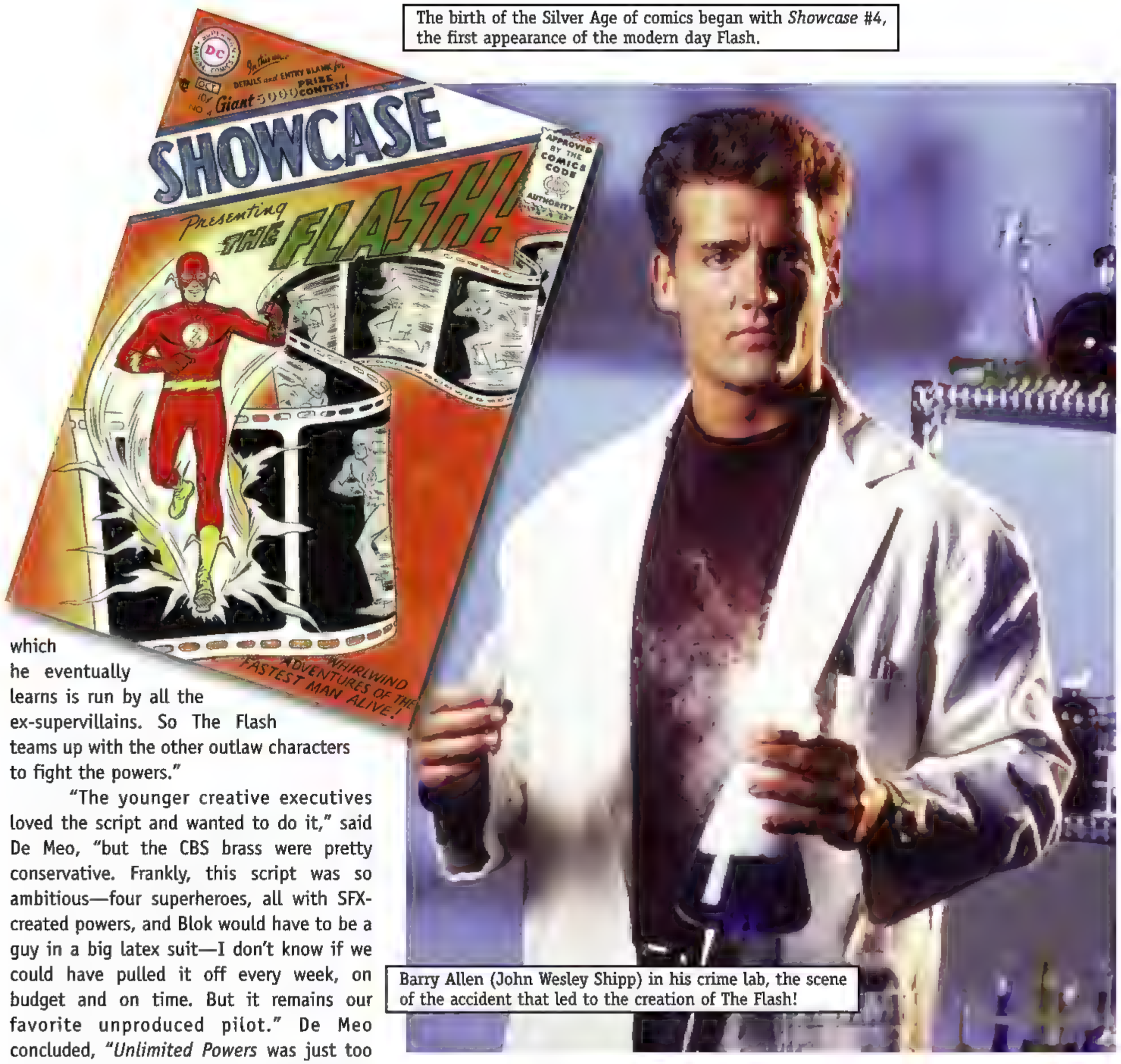
This television Flash would be an amalgam of different comic storylines, essentially taking the most interesting characters and aspects from the many Flash stories and continuities and mixing them all together. While most closely based on the Barry Allen version of The Flash, there were also very visible inclusions from the Wally West era as well as the original 1940 version. The producers of the show, Paul De Meo and Danny Bilson, were comic book fans. De Meo explained, "I probably read more superhero comics as a kid than Danny did—mostly DC. From the late seventies and into the eighties, we read a lot of the new books that were coming out—vastly different material than what I read as an eight-year-old, of course. We both have a love of comics and pulp in general—science fiction, fantasy, and classic detective fiction."

De Meo and Bilson were able to bring the character to life at CBS, even though they were relatively fresh faces in Hollywood. De Meo described how *The Flash* came to exist. "We went to Warner Brothers Television in 1986. There was some interest in the work we'd done at Empire Films—low budget sci-fi features. We'd also already sold *The Rocketeer* to Disney. We'd end up doing endless drafts on that all the way to production. We weren't signed on specifically for the DC character development; that came later. We wrote a few pilots that didn't go to series before we got into the DC material."

"Warner Brothers owns DC," continued De Meo, "and there was a push to exploit the properties for movies and TV. We went to a meeting with DC and WB execs, and they gave us a fat catalogue of all their characters, new and old. Aside from major figures like Batman and Superman, we were told to pick some characters we liked and come up with a viable concept. What we came up with was *Unlimited Powers*. We always admit that *Unlimited Powers* was influenced by *Watchmen*. We kept thinking, how can we get something like this on TV, how can we approach the sensibility, obviously without pushing limits of violence and so on which would kill it immediately. The script featured the Barry Allen version of The Flash, along with a young Dr. Occult, the daughter of the Green Arrow (we killed him off in the pilot), and Blok, who was kind of like a cross between the Thing and Paul Chadwick's Concrete. For nuclear détente with the Soviets (late eighties, remember), the US agrees to outlaw the use of superpowers—the 'Limited Powers Act.' All the heroes have to step down. 'Use a power, go to jail.' Everyone surrenders or just leaves the planet but The Flash, who we play older and kind of hard-boiled. He's captured and put in suspended animation. There's a glitch and he wakes up in a future dystopia—

John Wesley Shipp as The Flash, the fastest man in the world!

The birth of the Silver Age of comics began with *Showcase* #4, the first appearance of the modern day Flash.



Barry Allen (John Wesley Shipp) in his crime lab, the scene of the accident that led to the creation of The Flash!

which he eventually learns is run by all the ex-supervillains. So The Flash teams up with the other outlaw characters to fight the powers."

"The younger creative executives loved the script and wanted to do it," said De Meo, "but the CBS brass were pretty conservative. Frankly, this script was so ambitious—four superheroes, all with SFX-created powers, and Blok would have to be a guy in a big latex suit—I don't know if we could have pulled it off every week, on budget and on time. But it remains our favorite unproduced pilot." De Meo concluded, "*Unlimited Powers* was just too extreme, but what emerged was take just The Flash and build a show around him. There was only the pilot deal at first, with no guaranteed episodes. We wrote a two-hour script and had to build a presentation reel from the first footage, with a ton of action with The Flash in costume so we could sell the look, effects, and so on. So, that was assembled as we were filming. Even if the show didn't go, CBS would have a two-hour 'movie-of-the-week' to air. But they loved the presentation and we got the series order while we were still filming the pilot."

Lead actor John Wesley Shipp described how he became involved with *The Flash*. "I had just done *Neverending Story II* and the casting director on that project brought me out from New York to LA. Shortly after I got there, there was a buzz about Warner Brothers going to do this superhero treatment for television, and they asked if I had any interest in reading and auditioning for it. My first reaction was 'no,' because I was used to the low-budget treatments of superheroes, and when I found out it was The Flash, I just had a nightmare in my head of running around in a pair of red tights. Then they assured me that, no, it was going to be a darker sensibility, very high-tech. It wasn't cheesy or anything like that. So I agreed to go in and read for it and I was the first guy that they read for the role. Danny and Paul read about sixty guys, and then they took me and one other guy to the network and read through a couple scenes for about fifteen, twenty people at CBS and that basically was the procedure. Then they wanted to see more videotape and film on me, so after we did the screen test at CBS, waited for about four, five days, and then it was announced that I had the part."

De Meo also remembered Shipp's introduction. "When John auditioned, we knew immediately that he'd be a great

choice. Not only did he have the right look for the character, John understood the mix of humor and heroism we needed. He also meshed well with Amanda Pays [fresh off of cult favorite series *Max Headroom*, who would play Tina McGee] and Alex Desert. John was charming and believable as Barry, and he could put the suit on and kick ass when the time came for The Flash to arrive in the action."

The divine Amanda Pays as Tina McGee, The Flash's love interest.

With their all-important series order, De Meo and Bilson sought out more talent to work on the weekly version of *The Flash*. Their love of comics led the two to bring in another integral team in the form of Howard Chaykin and John Francis Moore. Chaykin was responsible for DC's incredibly popular mini-series update of *The Shadow*. He also wrote and illustrated the influential *American Flagg!* series along with his writing partner, Moore. "I moved to Southern California in 1985 to try to get into the motion picture business," Howard Chaykin recalled. "I wrote a couple of movies, none of which were produced. I was asked by Danny Bilson and Paul De Meo, the guys who produced *The Flash*, to come on as a staffer. John and I were hired as a team. By the time I came on, they had already bought a pilot and twelve. I was hired three days before they finished shooting the pilot."

Paul De Meo also recalled the team's introduction, "We were Chaykin fans, primarily from *American Flagg!* So we tracked him down and offered him a position on the staff, along with John Francis Moore, who was Howard's writing partner at the time. Howard and John had never written a TV script before. The first draft of their first episode script was literally impossible to produce. It seemed like it had a hundred sets and a bigger speaking cast than *Lawrence of Arabia*. But they learned extremely quickly and eventually turned out many of the best scripts on the show. Howard and John also had a tremendous knowledge of superhero characters and fiction to draw from. Howard in particular has more ideas for plots than any human I know."

Chaykin agreed with the assessment. "The first script John and I wrote was called 'Watching the Detectives.' Our first draft was huge and unwieldy, but with a couple days' work, we brought it into a shootable show, making use of all those standing sets. One of the things you learn very quickly in television is your job is to produce the show with the money you've got. A lot of people just don't seem to get that. You've got to service your cast, and you've got to do it on budget, which means getting as many shooting days as possible on your standing sets. The more you go off-set, the more money you're spending."

Fortunately, there was no resistance to hiring comic book writers by CBS, as Chaykin explained, "No one other than Danny and Paul knew me as a comic book guy when I started on television, so it didn't matter. When I started out I was a staff guy. I had very little contact with the executives except to respond to their notes. I wanted the job. It was a terrific opportunity to get into television, and with the budget they'd given us, it was worthwhile."

With a series order, it was important to get into the swing of things right away. But the writing staff was small compared to most hour-long weekly series. Chaykin described, "It was a small staff. There was John and me, there was Gail Hickman, who remains a friend, Danny Bilson and Paul De Meo, and a couple other guys who left the show shortly before we started and never had an episode produced." Fortunately they were able to push through and continue work with such a small number of writers.

"Not only was *The Flash* our first series," De Meo added about beginning production of the weekly show, "we had never even been on the writing staff of a series before. We barely knew what the hell we were doing, but we surrounded ourselves with talented people. We were warned, but we didn't understand how hard running a series was going to be until the train had left the station. We did the final rewrite on virtually every script, because we were so focused on what we thought we wanted. Some rewrites were really extensive. That killed us, when you added in everything else we were responsible for. What we learned was that you have to delegate to those you trust and walk away. You can't pick every prop, or look at every piece of

Brought together by mysterious circumstances, scientists Tina McGee (Amanda Pays) and Barry Allen (John Wesley Shipp).

wardrobe. We also learned to split duties, which really helped us in the series that followed."

As if all of the duties for *The Flash* weren't enough, De Meo and Bilson were also responsible for completing writing tasks on their biggest feature film up to that point. De Meo remembered, "Working on the production drafts of *The Rocketeer* while producing *The Flash* was tough. We didn't get to spend nearly enough time on the set of the movie, which I know frustrated Joe Johnston, the director. When *Rocketeer* was shooting on the Disney lot, it was a little easier, because it's minutes away from the Warner Bros. lot. The exterior of the South Seas Club in *The Rocketeer* was filmed on the Warner's back lot, where Central City was built. We really wanted a photo of The Flash and The Rocketeer in their costumes together, but John wasn't suited up on the set that night, so we missed it."

Scripts for *The Flash* could have been a nightmare if each writer hadn't been talented or fully understood their responsibilities. This was a case where the small stable of writers was actually a benefit, since they were afforded freedoms and potential that a series with a larger staff may not have offered, especially for Chaykin and Moore. Chaykin explains, "It was an open roundtable. We'd get together every week to hash out story ideas. John and I generated a lot of material for ourselves and for others. We weren't particularly lucky with freelancers, who tended to want to write much bigger shows than we could afford to produce. And because Danny and Paul were so preoccupied with working on *The Rocketeer*, John and I ended up writing quite a bit of material, and had a lot to do with the tone and direction the show took. My job was to give the character life and fun—not to put my own stamp on it." Howard Chaykin concluded, regarding his role in the production, "I've never believed that that's my responsibility. One has to respect the material that's come before, unless you're given a prime directive to actually take that material and reinvent it."

Paul De Meo continued, "The story tone we wanted was simple: Even though what's happening is unreal, play it straight. There was always humor, but never camp. We hate camp—camp smells of condescension. We wanted to believe in the story the same way you do when you read a comic. Sometimes we had unexpected moments of violence, especially in the pilot."

Treating the material as real and believable was a goal for everyone on the show, especially to Shipp. "It was definitely a learning curve associated with how best to truthfully portray Barry Allen. That was my primary job. Who is Barry Allen? What's he like? What doesn't he like? What are his hopes and dreams? What are his possibilities? How does he react when [he] suddenly discovers that he has [powers]? In other words, we didn't want to camp it, we didn't want to send it up. We wanted to say, 'Okay, what if this guy, who is not the favorite son, who basically decides to work in a crime lab, what would he do if suddenly he found out suddenly that you reach for a cup of coffee it would smash against the far wall, you ran to catch a bus and ended up thirty miles away in the ocean, what would you do?' So in the beginning, portraying the human element and all of that I felt was my first obligation and my first duty."

The story for the pilot provided no difficulty for Shipp and his fellow castmates to keep themselves grounded in reality. Allen's life was difficult. The location for the pilot was Central

City, where Barry Allen works as a police crime lab scientist. He has broken the family tradition of being a street police officer by choosing to do his crime-fighting in the lab. This leads to difficulties with his father, who feels that Barry is not a "real" policeman.

The TV version of *The Flash* gains his powers in the same manner as the comic Barry Allen. While staying late in his lab analyzing evidence to help thwart a crime spree, a lightning bolt crashes through his laboratory window and strikes a series of chemicals and Allen. He goes down, unconscious with wisps of smoke and electric charges playing about his body. After his accident, Allen wants to go about his life as usual. But his doctor finds oddities in his bloodwork and sends the results to STAR Labs, an advanced laboratory in Central City. Initially Allen is wary of STAR Labs because of stories of shady experiments and the unusual death of one of their scientists. After a scary and unexpected demonstration of his powers, Allen receives a call from Tina McGee at STAR, and he decides to see if she can help him understand what is going on.

McGee also has her own tragic backstory. It was her husband David who was killed doing research at STAR Labs. Despite this, she decides to stay on as one of their scientists. When he sees that McGee has her own misgivings about her employer, Allen decides to allow her to continue evaluating his powers in secret. Given that Allen is concerned about his powers leading to premature aging, or having his body outright fail or burn up on him, he simply wants McGee's help to rid himself of the powers at first. But once his brother Jay, a motorcycle policeman, is murdered, he also knows he can use his new abilities to help solve the crime and catch the killers.

When *The Flash* began, Allen also had a perky, artist girlfriend named Iris (played by Paula Marshall), but as Howard Chaykin explained, she didn't last long. "Iris disappeared pretty quickly. I thought it was a good move to remove Iris, because we wanted to have a character who could play the field." By the time *The Flash* reached series status, Iris was gone.

Another element added to provide Barry Allen with some real-life difficulties was the fact that his new powers came with a high price. Every time he uses his speed, his body reacts negatively with massive metabolic failures. He suffers from low blood sugar that gets so bad, he passes out. To counteract this, he needs massive amounts of food to keep at a normal level. The reactions are unpredictable in terms of how bad they could be each time, and McGee worries that he may be in extreme danger every time he uses his powers. But on the plus side, his powers help to strengthen his muscles and drastically accelerate his recovery time from severe injuries.

Tina McGee turns out to be Allen's only real confidant. Aside from his Golden Retriever, Earl, who seems a bit nervous around Allen at times after he receives his powers, no one else knows his secret identity. Once he successfully catches the criminals responsible for his brother's death, Allen decides to continue on as The Flash. With Tina McGee's agreement, the two decide to press on to see just what Allen is capable of.

The villains in the pilot were a motorcycle gang called the Dark Riders, led by Jay Allen's former partner Nick Pike (played by actor Michael Nader). While they were a little excessive in their actions and dress, they could still have easily existed in reality. De Meo added, "Our villains generally were pretty bad—they murdered people. We wanted to be very clear right from the start that we were not making a comedy here, that this was not a spoof." Within the weekly series, *The Flash*'s villains were mostly grounded in reality, but the network was always putting pressure on the production to "up" the quality of the bad guys. Howard Chaykin remembered, "The operative term in those days was 'worthy adversary.' We had to come up with characters who could keep up with The Flash as the hero. We did a Mirror Master story and we were always looking for ways to do the Rogues' Gallery [a collection of villains from *The Flash* comic series]. There was a studio objection to costumed super-villains, because there was an attempt to create a more heightened sense of reality, which we understood."

Shipp detailed additional changes during the series' run, "In the beginning, they said I would not be saving children from burning buildings, which was a real plus, because I didn't want to play 'The Hero.' I liked that the motivation was dark. It was a revenge motivation based on the death of his brother, and not a desire to do good for the world. It was a much more personal, darker motivation. However, bowing to pressure from whoever it came from, the studio, I don't know who it was. But I did, in fact, save a child from a burning building, much to my chagrin. At the end, I had mixed feelings about it," continued Shipp. "In one respect I thought we were coming into our own. I enjoyed the comic elements. On the other hand, if we had done another season, I would have wanted us to compromise. I wouldn't want it to have been so broad that we fell into the TV series trap of not taking it seriously, and going for the easy, quick laughs and the broad characterizations, that we got so far away from reality that only diehard comic fans would relate to it. I wanted to keep the grit and the reality to it, and I think that's the success of shows like *Smallville*. It's about the human being. But I will say we were all on a learning curve here, and it was such a beast. It was the most expensive show Warner Brothers had done for television at that point. We

were constantly fighting, even when we had a big budget, we were constantly going over budget because we all wanted it to be really good, really great. And it was really an obsession for, like, the second week in August through the first week in May, with four days off for Christmas and that was it, that season. We were all round the clock trying to make the best—to have the best of both worlds, the reality and all the comic sensibility we could."

Obviously fans of the comic would have liked seeing more of The Flash's villains included in the series, but pleasing comic fans is a different game than pleasing television fans. Chaykin explained, "The comics material on which all this stuff is based reaches a microscopic audience compared to the mass market of movies and television—thousands, as opposed to millions. Comic book people, who live inside the bubble of comic books, tend to think comics are much more influential than they are. How many people out there know that *History of Violence* was a comic book, or *Road to Perdition*? When people think of comic books, they think of Superman, Batman, and Archie."

The few Flash comic villains that turned up in the series included the previously mentioned Mirror Master, played by David Cassidy, and Captain Cold, played by Michael Champion. Neither looked nor behaved particularly like their comic counterparts. Studio objections or not, one major Flash villain did make it into the series in costume for a couple episodes. The appearances of The Trickster ended up being high points in the series' run. He, along with a couple other toned-down enemies, gave fans a little more of what they were looking for. Chaykin added, "The Trickster and Nightshade episodes were terrific. Mark Hamill, who was fantastic as The Trickster, was just a great sport. Richard Burgi in the second Nightshade episode was sensational, as was Jason Bernard in the first one."

But if costumed nemeses were not generally desired, the main hero's suit was seen as crucial by the network. The Flash's costume was easily the single most important visual element of the series. Paul De Meo recalled early discussion of its creation. "A lot of actors who might have been interesting in the part refused to wear the red suit—even though we knew it was going to look cool. The network wanted to cast Jack Coleman, from *Dynasty*. But Coleman had fear of red spandex and dropped out."

The suit had some big name talent behind its design and construction. "Dave Stevens [creator of *The Rocketeer*] actually redesigned the suit for us," continued De Meo. "He streamlined it, made the boots red instead of yellow, made the overall color darker red, and made the cowl more 'predatory.' It was then built by Robert Short, who had done the Batman suits for Tim Burton's film." For some reason, Stevens only received credit for his work in the pilot, although his design was used throughout the series.

The iconic red suit also had its own unique origins. Gone was The Flash's expanding suit from the comic that would pop out from his ring. To change into his costume, this Flash would simply disappear for a second then reappear fully decked out. When Allen decided to have his powers examined and measured by Tina McGee, she supplied him with a "borrowed" outfit

Amanda Pays followed her turn on the cult series *Max Headroom*, to play Tina McGee, another role destined to make her a sci-fi favorite.

capable of withstanding the punishment he would subject it to—a prototype Soviet deep-sea suit. It had properties that allowed it to withstand a great deal of high-velocity pressure and, using an internal layer of reactive insulation, it regulated body temperature. Additionally, it molded itself to its wearer's body shape. With the addition of some gloves, a mask and a lightning bolt logo designed by Allen, the diving suit became the basis for The Flash's space-age costume.

Shipp discussed the costume, referring back to his initial misgivings about having The Flash running around in "red tights." "Later on I wished I had just been running around in tights, because the suit was so uncomfortable. Difficult to work in. But I say that facetiously. I never wished that was the case, because I thought the suit worked really well and it looked good. It saved me from any sort of sense of embarrassment. Both Richard Burgi [another of the final contenders for the lead role, who later returned for an episode in the series] and I, who were taken to the network, obviously worked out a lot," continued Shipp. When asked if he had to read lines in costume, "There was no swimsuit competition. In fact, I joked about that at the time. When they brought us back to do the scene again, I was like, 'Ah, now the swimsuit competition.' But we just basically went in and did scenes. There was no testing in the suit because there was no suit. Once they had cast the actor, then they went about building the suit, and that was a very grueling procedure, actually. They built four suits at a cost of $100,000. The process for me was, I went in and they did a body cast, then when that was done, they sculpted individual muscle pieces to shape, to custom shape to my under-muscular structure."

Not only was the creation of the suit grueling, but the daily wardrobe application was also extremely difficult. There

The Flash's costume was glued onto actor John Wesley Shipp each time it was used.

were no real shortcuts that could be taken. Shipp discussed how the suit was fitted each time. "The way they did the suit was, they greased me down and then they wrapped me in, like, Saran Wrap, and they put a leotard over that. Then they went about gluing the individual muscle pieces onto the spandex suit that I had on my body. Once that dried, they slopped it with a red material; they wanted to have a super-muscularized structure, and at the same time realized that the guy's thing was speed, it was motion, so it couldn't be a hard suit of armor like the *Batman* movie. It had to move with the character. It wouldn't make any sense."

"The problem we had at the beginning," continued Shipp, "it was so hot that I'd be wearing it for maybe a half-hour, forty-five minutes, I would sweat. I'd start sweating through the suit, so it actually looked like the suit was sweating. It would get so bad that I'd literally be pouring. It would be streaming down the outside of the suit. So then they sprayed it with a sealant, which meant that I became under the suit like a lake within about forty-five minutes. I'd take off the gloves and they'd be literally full of water up to the wrists. Once we started shooting episodes, they got a vest like racecar drivers wear, which I would put on underneath the suit. It had tubing in it and they'd plug me up to an ice chest and circulate ice water through the vest in between takes.

"They hadn't factored in the heat and they hadn't factored in how best to accommodate my having to play Barry Allen and then do stuff in the suit," Shipp continued, "So we would start in the suit at three in the morning, glue on the face, and then take all that off and put on make-up and be Barry, and then get back in the suit and out of the suit and in the suit. Also they did the gluing of the mask down, and they'd be taking it off with acetone and putting make-up over that, then putting make-up remover on top of that, then putting the glue back. So it was just very uncomfortable. I'd be, like, raw. So that was really difficult. Later on I had to request that I should do all my Barry Allen scenes, which was most of my work, do those first, while I could still think and then let's do The Flash later. If time demands were great, I would go and do The Flash stuff first and then do the Barry Allen scenes. But I wouldn't go, Flash, Barry; Flash, Barry, Flash, Barry, because that just was too difficult, physically."

Shipp concluded about the difficult process of wearing The Flash's costume, "Also, they couldn't clean the suits. There were two for me and two for the stunt men and I had to hide them in my trailer and spray them with Lysol because the foam latex began to crumble because of all the sweating. You know, you'd put it on at five in the morning, it would still be wet from the night before. At one point Danny Bilson cracked; I hope he was joking, but they said they were going to get me a psychiatrist due to putting me through [everything] with putting on the suit. They thought I had this mental, psychological block to being in the suit. But it was more physical than psychological. There definitely had been a learning curve, it was definitely very challenging."

Paul De Meo added, "We have to give John an immense amount of credit. That Flash suit was horribly uncomfortable and with all the night shooting and extra hours, it was a physically demanding role."

Wearability issues aside, John Wesley Shipp also recalled how the usage of the suit changed due to network desires. "Initially the suit was never supposed to be shown in full light, full body. It was supposed to be just pieces of it, glimpses of it, very darkly lit, like in shadow. I think that the creative team succumbed a little bit to the pressure of the network, because the reason you want to see the suit is because you haven't seen the suit. Once you've seen the suit, you've shot your wad, you know what I mean? So I would always say, just show a piece of it, show an arm, show a shoulder, show half of a body, show the head in profile. You know, things like that. But it's a continual battle. That's the thing about television, everything is done by committee and by the time you get a script it has twenty-five sets of fingerprints on it. You're trying to maintain your own integrity, and it's business, so you have to make your bosses happy. So it's a tug-of-war."

De Meo went on to discuss what he and Bilson wanted overall for the visual elements on *The Flash*. "The look of the show we developed on our own, along with our producer Don Kurt. The colored lights, the mix of old and new cars and wardrobes, the WPA-style murals and so on. We knew we wanted Central City to be 'film noir' but to also have a sort of timeless fantastical quality. We were inspired by *Batman*, but also by the look of Warren Beatty's *Dick Tracy* and by the way the comics looked in the Silver Age. When the Warner's executives saw the first dailies, there was a moment of panic—they thought we had violated their decree not to make a 'period show.' So we took a few hats off the men, toned down the ladies' wardrobe and mixed in some newer cars. But we maintained a very conscious mix of classic design—mostly streamline through 'mid-century'—with modern technology, props, and wardrobe."

It was clear that one of the main goals for the series was to replicate recent motion picture successes on television. In terms of storytelling, cinematography and feel of the production, *The Flash* was a very theatrical series. Its undefined time period and shadowy sets evoked a feel that was reflective of both the *Batman* and *Dick Tracy* features the producers strove to capture. Keeping heavy shadows with small sections lit by colored key lights not only kept production costs a little lower, but provided a moody element that suited the show perfectly. Central City was not a bright, cheery place.

Dick Tracy and *Batman* were also heavily influential on the music for *The Flash*. Danny Elfman and Shirley Walker worked together on both of the features as composer and conductor respectively. For *The Flash*, Elfman composed a theme that was very difficult to tell apart from his *Batman* main title, while Walker (who would later go on to score many productions for animated DC series) adapted *The Flash* theme and played off of it for her series arrangements. Together, they added a more

grand and majestic feel to the material that helped to subtly raise the quality of the production.

CBS put their all into the series, and a major promotional push was undertaken. Despite this, *The Flash* had difficulty finding a core audience. De Meo explained, "I think CBS believed in the show, initially. It was expensive, and it took a leap of faith to put on the air. It was well promoted when it started out, because the network and the studio wanted it to proceed." After the pilot and additional twelve hours were aired, the network still believed enough in *The Flash* to order an additional eight hours. Although this second order would ultimately be the final, it did bring *The Flash*'s total to twenty-one episodes—close to a complete first season, which at that time was normally twenty-two to twenty-four episodes.

De Meo brought up what was probably the most damaging factor to *The Flash*, "You could argue that our show's demographic was younger than CBS' at that time." Chaykin agreed, adding, "I do know that it was a very difficult sell to the audience because there was nowhere on CBS, which in those days was the network that skewed much older than it does today, to sell a show like *The Flash*. *The Flash* was a young-skewing show, which had no precedent on the network, which is why they tried so many different ways to sell the show. They ran us on the half-hour. They put us up against *The Cosby Show* and *The Simpsons*, and they kicked our ass."

While not on directly against those two powerful programs, the audience that tuned in to NBC and FOX did not automatically change the channel to CBS at 8:30. It was a bold choice to start *The Flash* on the half-hour, and one that the network should be commended for trying. It proved that they did believe enough in *The Flash* to stagger its start in the hope of attracting viewers. But the network could only support and promote the show so much, and when the viewers didn't turn up, *The Flash* was at risk to stay on the air. De Meo concluded the thought, "In retrospect, the gambit of starting the show at 8:30 didn't work—the audience wants a one hour show to start on the hour. We were also pre-empted for baseball and they changed the time slot a few times, which confused people looking for the show." Add to the mix additional preemptions for coverage of the Gulf War through February 1991 and the result was disastrous for *The Flash*.

Unfortunately, the series did not last much longer. After several changes in schedule and time, lack of viewers and high production costs finally caught up with the scarlet speedster. *The Flash* was cancelled after its first season; the final episode aired on May 18, 1991. But if it had to end, at least it did so in top form with a final story featuring the return of The Trickster. The shame was that it was a solidly constructed show, with a great staff and cast. It could easily have gone on for years, as there were plenty of story opportunities available.

De Meo discussed the end of the series. "We were ultimately cancelled for a series with maybe a share point higher than *The Flash*. For a couple years afterwards, every time we went into CBS for a meeting, some executive in the room would regret canceling the show. So, the fans never got to see our planned two-part second season opener, when the Rogues' Gallery unite to crush The Flash once and for all. The cancellation felt bad, of course. You wonder how you failed, or if it was your failure at all. There are lots of elements at play that you have no control over, so you just have to move on to the next idea, I guess. We were never approached in any serious manner to bring back the series, or do a 'reunion' episode. We're just happy that the DVD set was finally released."

Shipp added, "The thing that we ran into was, of course, it was a mammoth show. It was the most expensive show Warner Brothers had done at that point. It took us six to seven weeks to shoot the pilot at a cost of, like, six million dollars, I think." Chaykin continued, "It's just insanely expensive, and that's why some of the most successful comic book stuff on TV has been the Superman, Batman, and Justice League material out of Warner's TV animation. On a weekly basis, comics don't necessarily work

The Flash's vibrant costume was redesigned by *The Rocketeer*'s Dave Stevens and built by Robert Short, who assembled Tim Burton's *Batman* film suits.

perfectly on television, because television is an intimate character-based medium, and because it's often difficult to do the kind of mega-special effects that exist in film to which the audience has become accustomed."

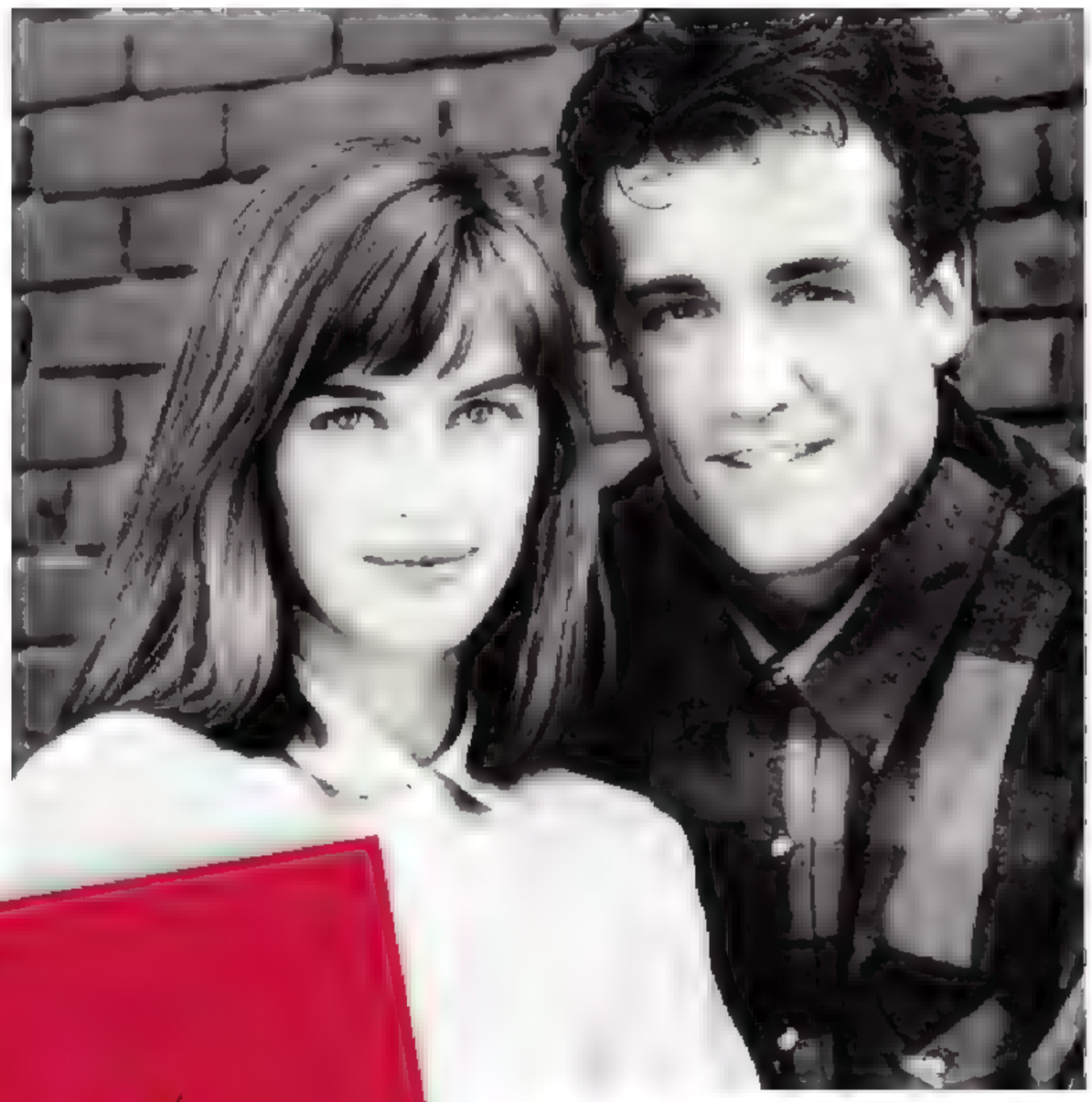
No one regretted working on *The Flash*. John Wesley Shipp especially believed in the value of the material and production. "My trust came from the original script when I saw, okay, these guys aren't sending it up and they aren't taking it too seriously. It was a good middle ground. In other words, they'd created a character that I felt had enough inner reality that I could emotionally wrap myself around, and at the same time the character didn't take it so seriously that it became grandiose or stilted or self-important. So it was a good combination. I think that once you've agreed and take on a project, then you pretty much have to trust the people that you're working with. I did, because once you decide to do something, if you're always second-guessing and doubting and not trusting, it totally spoils the experience for you, personally, and I don't think the product's very good.

"I've always believed that if I just show up and I try to do the best job that I can, and I serve the project and not my own ego, then things will work out," Shipp continued. "When I do that, that's been my experience. Now, the show only went one season, but the premise that we had was good. I don't know, maybe people who worry more about position or ratings might make a bigger splash momentarily, but I think that it's all about the work, the quality of your work. Doing the job to the best of your ability might not get you as much press as being the 'bad boy,' but I think in the long haul working with that set of ethics will help you have longevity in your career."

Howard Chaykin summed up his feelings about his first TV project. "I felt the show was a lot of fun, with a nice blend of jeopardy and humor. I feel that humor is what makes the material ultimately work, because it gives the characters a genuine scale. On that level I thought the show worked really beautifully. The relationship between Barry and the character Alex Desert played worked nicely. We had a good time. We got in, we worked hard, we worked long hours, and we wrote, produced, and shot a show every two weeks. It was a very satisfying process. I embraced the experience of working in television. I liked the collaborative process. I liked the fact that we all worked together, we all pulled together, we spent a great deal of time together. We ate together and we put in sixty- and seventy-hour workweeks. We were shooting on the lot, which was a gas. And when we did go off-lot, we were in downtown LA at night. It was a great shoot. It was a great crew. I moved to Southern California to see if I could get into the movie business, and that move ultimately evolved into a television career. Which was not my expectation, but I'm very happy with the way things turned out."

Paul De Meo added his final thoughts. "In the end I don't feel we have anything to prove concerning *The Flash*. We got to work on material we loved, and collaborated with many artists and writers we admired. We did our version pretty much the way we intended. We really wanted to make the best show ever based on a comic book, and we all almost killed ourselves trying to do that every week."

Although no additional attempts have been made to bring *The Flash* back to live-action, the team of Paul De Meo and Danny Bilson did team up again to create new Flash comic stories. While not based on the TV version, their return to The Flash proves that they have a great understanding, and love, of the character.

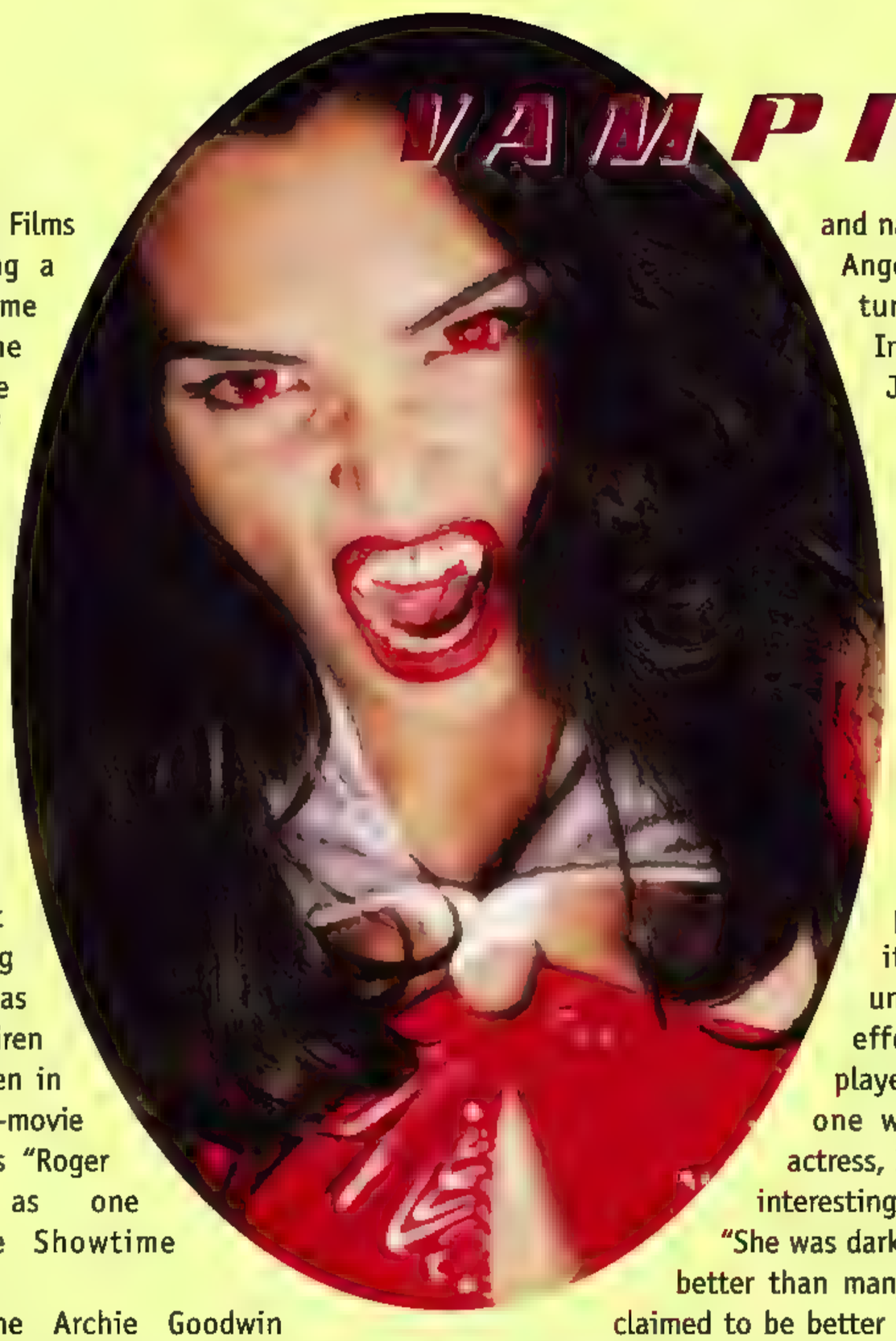


Amanda Pays and John Wesley Shipp headed up the most expensive hour of television on CBS at the time.

A promotional button handed out at the 1990 San Diego Comic-Con before *The Flash*'s premiere.

chapter 14

VAMPIRELLA



In the mid-seventies, Hammer Films came very close to producing a theatrical film starring femme fatale Barbara Leigh as the scantily clad Vampirella, the sexiest heroine in the history of comics. Negotiations between Hammer and Warren Publishing collapsed and killed the movie. But from that fateful moment in 1969 when she first graced newsstands in a sexy painted cover by Frank Frazetta (no less), male readers were immediately smitten by her provocative costume, while girls appreciated her confident feminity. With Hollywood big shots drooling over her, it was inevitable that this vampire siren would arrive on the small screen in 1996, courtesy of legendary B-movie producer Roger Corman via his "Roger Corman Presents" slot as one of thirteen films for the Showtime cable channel.

"I grew up with the Archie Goodwin adaptation of Forry (Ackerman's) original concept, the late '60s/early '70s version of Warren's *Vampirella*," recounted Gary Gerani, the siren's screenwriter. "I wanted to maintain the Lovecraftian ideas Archie dreamed up (vampirism comes from another planet!), along with the star-crossed romantic relationship between our heroine and a committed, professional slayer, young Adam Van Helsing. The *Buffy* TV series was able to more fully explore this angst-driven union, reversing the sexes and naming the characters Buffy and Angel. 'Operation Purge' also turned up on *Buffy* as 'The Initiative'—a cool re-imagining, Joss. The dramatic scene where Vampi is chained and fighting her bloodlust, with captured Adam her intended victim, was taken directly from "Death's Dark Angel," the first Vampirella story I ever read. I even tried to retain some of Archie Goodwin's original dialogue."

Under the direction of Jim Wynorski, the *Vampirella* telefilm was an earnest little production that embraced its limited budget, relatively unknown cast and lackluster effects. Bond girl Talisa Soto played Vampirella. "Although no one will mistake her for a great actress, I found Talisa Soto to be quite interesting as Vampirella," stated Gerani. "She was darkly sympathetic and offbeat, far better than many of the B-movie bimbos who claimed to be better suited to the part. The altered costume was certainly a major issue, although, when all is said and done, she's still a woman with a beautiful body running around in red ribbons."

If *Vampirella* had been as well received as the non-comics heroine Black Scorpion, a fellow "Roger Corman Presents" feature, it might have been developed as a television series like Scorpion was. Rest assured that there will be a day when a new incarnation of this luscious vamp will be back for more blood.

Watch out, boys! Vampirella (actress Talisa Soto) has the looks that kill.

THE BIG BLUE BUG OF JUSTICE IS HERE!

chapter 15

Wherever there is evil and its evildoers...
Wherever there's injustice and jaywalking...
Wherever there are thugs, crooks, and politicians...
Wherever there's a blue plate special...
Rest assured, good citizen—
The Tick will be there!

THE TICK

In the summer of 1986, *The Tick* first appeared in the pages of *New England Comics Newsletter*, the in-house publication of the Boston comic book store chain of the same name. By 1988, Tick spread his brand of justice in his very own series; his moth-outfitted sidekick, Arthur, made his debut in issue four of the book. In the first story, the Big Blue Arachnid is described as the following: "He is superhumanly strong and nigh invulnerable, with the intelligence level of top soil."

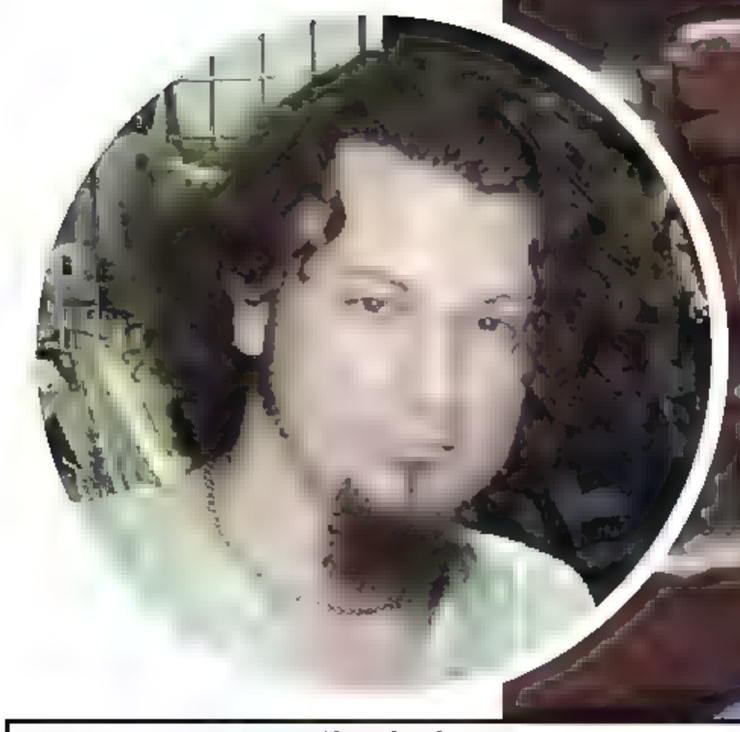
Born in 1968, Massachusetts native Ben Edlund was only seventeen when he made his deal with George Suarez, owner of New England Comics (NEC), to publish *The Tick* as a series. Although not heavily into comic books while growing up, he did enjoy *Richie Rich* and other kid comics until the involving nature of Alan Moore's *Swamp Thing* run lured him into appreciating the potential of the comics medium. The son of the accomplished artist and commercial art designer Richard Edlund, Ben was someone who always had the support of his parents in all his artistic endeavors, and they nurtured his desire to create. Edlund said, "I think my father's example was one thing, and I got a lot of the osmosis, a lot of training from my dad. He just would show up when I was drawing something and offer approval."

The Tick creator humbly added, "As far as other motivating factors, I think the big thing was, I was relatively shy, and drawing was kind of a chance to escape into somewhere where you had complete control. I was curious about the connections between shyness and obsessive, meticulous excellence. That's a large part of I think what kept me going. I kept getting positive results from drawing, and it sort of filled out an area that would otherwise have probably been filled out by sports and popularity. *[laughs]*"

As he began to get sucked into the comic book culture, he started to become a somewhat regular customer at a New England Comics store for his regular dose of books. Ben informed, "The idea of a comic book store was unknown to me until friends of mine got a license to drive, and then we drove over to Boston. And I was coming to admiration because I didn't realize there were that many comic books. Like, you'd see in the back pages of, say, *Epic*, ads for other comic books and stuff, and it seemed like there was something going on out there, but the idea of hundreds of thousands of books, different ones, independent titles, not just the ones you find with the covers torn off at a drugstore—that was pretty big. I was doing a strip for the high school paper when I could get around to it, and that was more what I thought of in terms of comic book stuff. And then going and seeing what was out there was... it had a pretty strong effect on what I thought was possible. That, plus we also started to play a

Come get a fistful of comeuppance, evildoer!

The Tick promotional subway poster.



Writer-artist Ben Edlund, the man responsible for unleashing the unstoppable Tick on all of us!

The Tick's bizarre origins started strangely enough, in this very book.

role-playing game called *Marvel Superheroes*, which wasn't a badly-designed game, but it also kind of took the veil off of superheroes, in a sense. You'd have to take all of their abilities and all of their strengths and weaknesses and kind of itemize them, and it began a process of breaking down superheroes and seeing what was mythic and clever about them, and also what was kind of naïve, even sometimes dumb about them, which really started to get me into the direction of superhero parody, which is of course where The Tick began."

Begun as a spec strip, Tick's true origin was as a joke during a role-playing game session amongst Ben's friends. Intrigued by the character that he jokingly made up, he began to think and draw him out as "an unstoppable, uncrushable, and somehow deeply disconnected goofball that fell from the sky." Not long after, the artist was beginning to feel confident in his work and drew some superhero samples with the hope of procuring some paying work. He showed them to art director Bob Polio and comic store owner/publisher George Suarez of NEC, who were impressed enough to call him back for a potential comic book they were developing. With college starting and the script to the comic arriving super-late, Ben realistically pondered on the opportunity when Suarez asked him to create a book based on his Tick strip instead. Excited with this offer, he worked on the first issue and developed the character more during his freshman (and part of his sophomore) year at Massachusetts College of Art, where he wanted to study film.

Thinking back, Edlund disclosed, "I would say that there were a lot of times when I had the book take precedence, and there were times when school suffered... Ultimately The Tick took precedence, and eventually I quit school to pursue it with the cartoons. So I never really got out of college. I never graduated from an institute of higher learning. I attended them for a period of time and that's about it."

The arrival of *Tick* #1 was a tremendous success for the proud teenage creator when it finally was released in 1988. "When we put it out," said Edlund, "we were sort of thinking, 'Well, we'll put out a few issues of this.' It was, like, right at the end of the black-and-white explosion, so maybe we'll get some people to notice it and I'll have something to keep in my portfolio that's been printed. But it managed to just catch a little bit of the flagging interest and energy that that big bubble had supported. So it was doing pretty well. By the time, they tell

me, in '90 or something like that, I think the print runs were at about 30,000 or something, so it was a very successful independent book, and that's when it sort of attracted the attention of a number of people in Hollywood and also in New York. They were sort of looking at the independent comics with an eye toward what would be the most titles that could be exploited in the way that the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* had been exploited."

Suddenly Edlund had various companies and enterprises at his doorstep and on the phone that wanting to develop The Tick into all sorts of products and things. Eventually, he made a deal with a company called Kiscom (a New Jersey toy designer and packager) that saw a lot of merchandising potential in Tick. Kiscom pitched the character to most of the big toy companies. They nearly made a deal with Bandai that envisioned making a toy line that hopefully would spring into a television show for young children. Later, Sunbow Entertainment came through with an offer for an animation show for the sympathetic Fox Kids (Fox's Saturday morning programming). Edlund wanted to concentrate more on the writing side and took the opportunity to do so in developing Tick's animated show, with writer Richard Libmann-Smith. By protecting his creation, he was able to help steer the production to embrace the original ideas and comedic situations that were a bit progressive for Saturday morning television. They were sophisticated enough for an audience of adults and savvy kids.

Edlund stated, "You're doing a loosely composed storyboard when you do a comic book. It's about as close to cinema as you can get in a form that doesn't take place over time but still uses space. Comic books use space instead of time, and you're really splitting things up into shots and dynamic kind of takes. So I'd been doing comic books sort of working in sort of like a film laboratory, and I was just waiting for when I could step into the thing I'd been wanting to do for the majority of my life. I still like drawing, I still like... I mean, I've done, very infrequently, like the comic book stuff, but my focus and a lot of my intensity was dedicating to working on the other side of the book's premise in a live-action role."

Despite a growing fan base and critical reviews, the animated show's ratings were not strong for the intended audience; the potential "Ninja Turtle-like" revenue for Tick's toyline fell apart after the first season. "It had a very sunshiney debut," said Edlund, "a daytime hit, and throughout all that whole period that we were on the air, the three years that we were, it had this growing baffled and very affectionate audience of adults, from a wide range of walks of life. That was really cool. What ultimately took place was, advertisers and Fox as a corporation started to notice that we were a Saturday morning TV show that had about a 52% adult audience, and what that meant was that all the things that they were trying to sell to kids they were being sold to people who weren't going to buy them."

The process of building the show only gave him more confidence in his storytelling and screenwriting talents. For Ben, working in television was a goal that he had wanted to accomplish since he was a child. The Tick's creator also stated, "For discipline, for the sense that you can sort of step onto the cultural stage and get something to stick there. These things, these forms of encouragement and even refinement of skill, they're really, really important. In the same breath, though, they all happened very, very early for me, and was kind of head-spinning. Like, when I got out of the pressure cooker of doing that for two years, I skidded around for a while, because I think I still had to absorb and assimilate all the newness and all that stuff. I mean, I was 24 when I had a show, 25 when I had a toy line. It was starting to blow my mind a little bit that there were people in China, what have you, Taiwan, I'm not sure now, that were assembling the absurd little plastic parts of my daydream for mass consumption. That was a lot to kind of absorb, so I went through moments of great arrogance and moments of complete emptiness. Put that in your little book! *[laughs]*"

With the animated series over, Edlund worked behind-the-scenes on various features and took some personal time. Not too long after, major film director Barry Sonnenfeld (*Men in Black*, *The Addams Family*) was extremely interested into bringing a live-action Tick television show to the air. Going in, Edlund was a little hesitant that television might want to change the design of the Tick character because "you'd have to think in terms of CGI or something in order to really present the deformities of the Tick's cranium, the lantern-ness of his jaw." When Edlund finally met Sonnenfeld, he was reassured that his vision for a live-action *Tick* could work with the director's strong sense of crisp visuals and style. Another important attraction was that Ben was going to be brought into live-action television as an integral member of this production. Sonnenfeld felt it was important to have the character's creator be a part of developing the show since Tick originated from him. For this reason, Ben was asked to write the pilot episode.

For Edlund, the hardest character to visualize three-dimensionally was Tick. During production it became apparent that the mask needed to be altered to allow the actor to emote and show expressions. When it came to casting, the perfect actor to fill The Tick's blue suit needed to be someone that possessed strength, charisma, an authoritative voice and that subtle sense of humor—this was the part that Patrick Warburton was born to play!

The prolific popular actor from *Seinfeld* and his current show *Rules of Engagement*, is also an instantly recognizable voice from his work on *Venture Bros.* and other popular cartoons. About his casting as the insect defender, Warburton recalled, "Fortunately for me, Barry Sonnenfeld was producing the show, and although we hadn't worked together at that point, that was his inspiration. So we sat down and had a nice meeting or two and he'd already decided that I was to play The Tick. Which is great, 'cause I love The Tick, and whenever you have to go in and read for something that you absolutely love, personally with me, I'll jeopardize it, you know? Something gets in the way."

Always the sidekick, never the hero, The Tick's loyal assistant Arthur (David Burke).

After the four-million-dollar pilot was filmed, there was a long time gap between that and the filming of subsequent installments. Edlund commented, "That was an issue that became a problem, because by the time they saw the pilot, they [FOX] really didn't know what they had bought. They really didn't understand superheroes enough to see that there was possible humor in superheroes." Almost from the beginning, there would be an endless struggle between the show's five producers and the FOX Network bosses over what exactly the show was about. Also, making the show was extremely costly since a lot of the show's budget was eaten up before shooting would even start. The behind-the-scenes drama made it difficult to locate a comfortable budget for filming a half-hour, rubber-costume adventure extravaganza.

While the writers of the show were focused on making the show as bold and absurd as the cartoons, the network wanted something closer to "*Seinfeld* with capes." All throughout filming of the series, Edlund and his crew were reminded that budget limited action scenes, over-the-top gizmos, or fancy melees. Edlund commented, "There were spider cars and rooftop battles and really a lot of sh*t that just could not be done. But our eyes were too big for our fiscal stomachs, and we could see a lot of suffering, I think, in the course of that show, because we just didn't have the optimum design for it. That's just about what you can actually get on camera. The other issues were that its sensibility hadn't really been defined and it was being pulled in several directions at once. So whatever works on that show kind of works despite those somewhat daunting conditions."

"It seems that money is the factor, and that's paramount to a network," expressed Warburton. "I mean, even when we had done the episodes. The critics loved the shows and it was anticipated when those in the upper suits at FOX were looking at the figures saying this is a pretty exorbitantly expensive show, because it was a half-hour show that was shot single-camera, so that show cost as much as an hour show to make. That year with *Joe Millionaire*, that came out and they were making a fortune on reality shows which cost nothing to produce. So they did everything they could to kill *The Tick*, and that was sad because all of us that were part of it really wanted to do it. But it just was not to be."

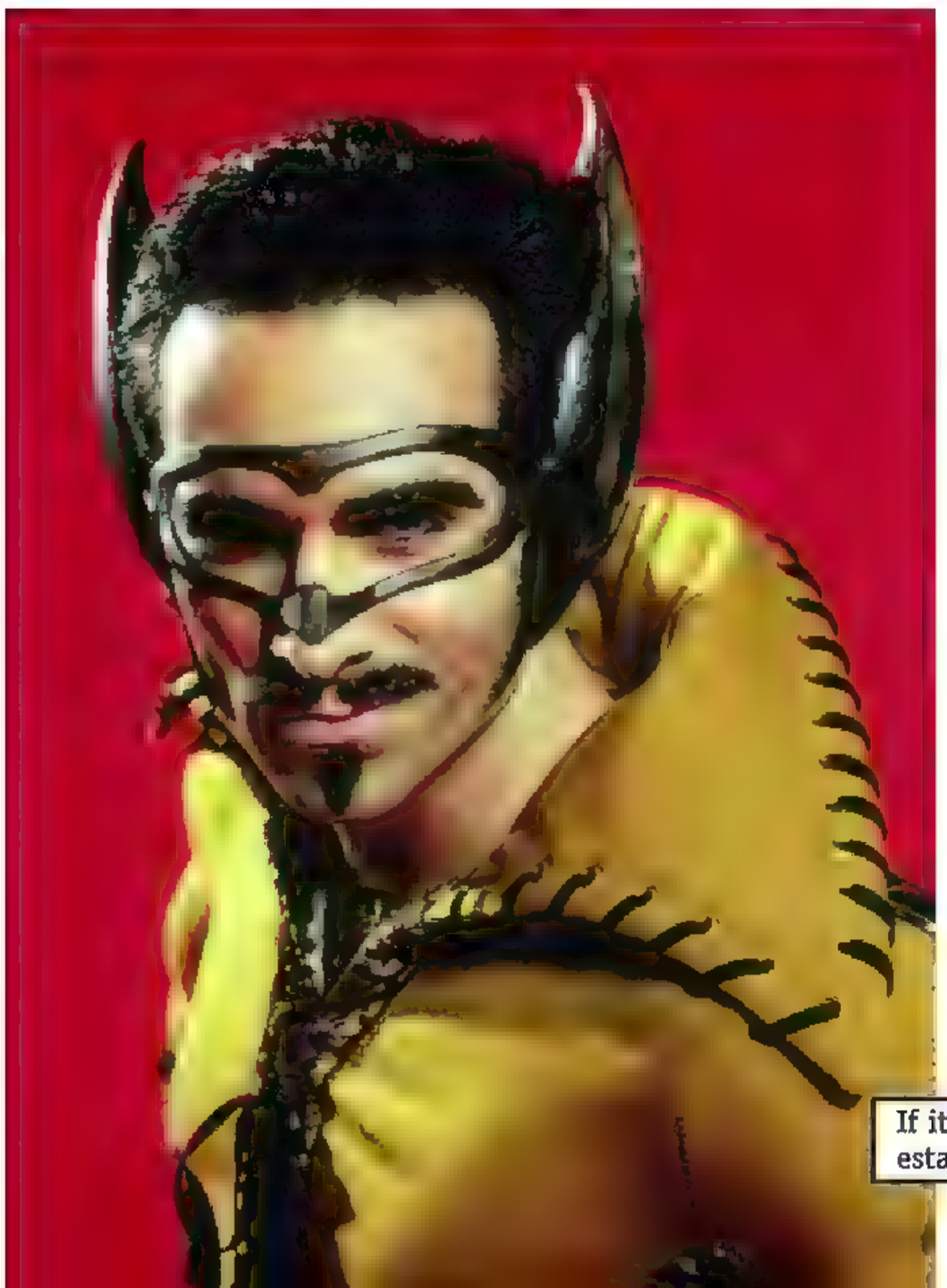
After the pilot was shot, Larry Charles (one of the instrumental writers of *Seinfeld* and the director of *Borat*) was brought into the fold to bring his comedy touch and television experience to the series. Because of his participation, the network also started to market the show as being "from one of the creators of *Seinfeld*." As soon as he arrived, the writer/director observed that the show's production had hit some potholes. Charles said, "They had done the pilot and, you know, I knew The Tick from the cartoon and from the comic books, and I was a big fan of it and they did the pilot. Barry Sonnenfeld directed the pilot and it was a very expensive pilot and they said it cost like four million dollars to do the pilot, which is a lot of money for a half-hour pilot, and they said great, now make a series. And of course they had no idea how to make a series with the very little money that would in any way resemble the four-million dollar pilot directed by Barry Sonnenfeld. So of course, they managed to find me and made that my problem. I came in, I talked to Ben [Edlund] I talked to Barry Josephson who was one of the producers at the time, and we all had similar sensibilities about it and I got involved."

The show was slated to air on Thursday night against *Survivor* and *Friends*, with a then-faltering *Family Guy* as a lead-in. With that competition it never had a chance, nor was it heavily promoted on the network. After the second episode, the show aired all over the map. It became apparent that the network was struggling to find a timeslot that worked for the series. All of these things made it hard for viewership to build since the audience probably had a tough time discovering it. Although Sonnenfeld had a vision for the show in establishing its look, other obligations (like filming his *Big Trouble* movie) at the height of his career kept him preoccupied. He could not

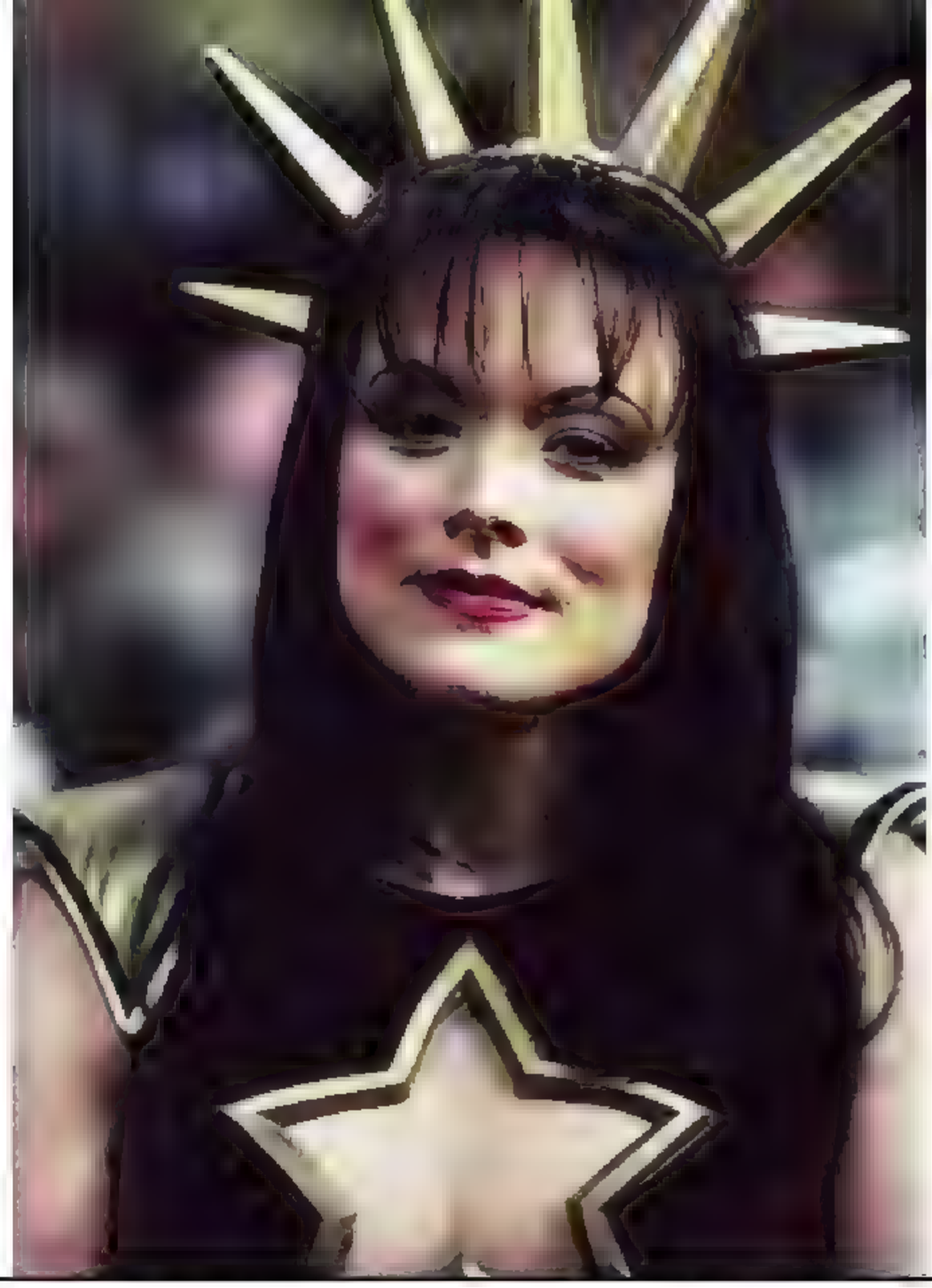
confront network executives on a day-to-day basis. His involvement and name got the show rolling, but with circumstances changing, the network began to display less faith in the series. Further complicating matters, each subsequent episode also had a budget orbiting around one million dollars.

Warburton mentions, "I don't know if Barry could have done more. God love him, he did everything he could, but when you're butting heads against the network... You know, too, *The Tick* was also, it was a product of Sony, Columbia and FOX, and in the midst of that, one of those studios, actually the TV department was going away. I believe it was Columbia. It got very complicated and nobody knew who really even owned it at that point. Above and beyond all of that, it was very, very expensive. We were dead in the water. We had the potential to make a fun show. We do have nine fun episodes, but really, we were just figuring out how to make this show work. A show as complex as *The Tick*, it's going to take some time to really get in tune and figure out what you can do, what you can get away with, how you can push the boundaries, where you can take your jabs and all that fun stuff. We were just figuring it all out and that was it."

Despite it all, the results of the nine episodes filmed was utter magic. Rather than counting on big budget effects and enormous sets, the series writers found humor in the absurdity of just being a superhero in the real world. Everyday trivialities were a bit more amplified when you had someone dressed in an extravagant costume. All of a sudden the most mundane scenarios could literally become moments of pure hilarity (and all accomplished without a laugh track). To a degree, lessening the big screen aesthetics that Sonnenfeld put into the pilot allowed the characters and comedy to really stand out. Edlund,



If it's ladies night, Batmanuel (Nestor Carbonell) estara presente.



Heavy is the head that wears the crown... of Captain Liberty (Liz Vassey).

Charles, Chris McCulloch (creator of *The Venture Bros.*) and other writers were able to write very ambitious and intelligent work throughout *The Tick*'s short run. For Fox, the entire combination of circumstances was just too unusual for them to completely figure out how to sell.

Warburton said, "My focus as an actor playing The Tick was just to focus on exactly what it was that I had to do. So a lot of the stuff that was going on peripherally, I didn't even notice. Until the end, then I realized what was happening in the midst of all of it. My job was just to do my job and have fun doing it. Which I did. Yeah, certainly [Tick] lives in his own world. There is that Don Quixote reference in one of the episodes of *The Tick* when he has that shaving cream moustache and whatnot. So certainly The Tick did have some super-abilities, but at the same time he was one who definitely had delusions of grandeur. At the same time, he's also the most earnest fellow you would ever meet, and a true do-gooder. But he's huge and fun and absurd—it's all about perspective. He had a wonderful perspective on life, and friendship and partnership."

Every superhero has to have friends and allies that he can count on in the inevitable pinch (or in-between cycles at the launderette). Tick's friends for the most part were almost as aloof and lovable as big blue yonder himself. The cast was nicely held united by the seamless chemistry between the very witty performances of Nestor Carbonell (as the aspiring mack daddy named Batmanuel), Liz Vassey (in the guise of Captain Liberty, maybe the only sane hero), and David Burke (as Arthur, the Tick's truest friend/sidekick and the wind beneath his wing). If the show had continued, Edlund felt that Arthur's role would

The City is safe, with Captain Liberty's (Liz Vassey) torch lighting the way.

have been more developed as the only real adult among the principals. The Tick creator said, "He probably would have had relationships. He was the one who was mostly out of his costume, where, at the very least, he was sort of the Arthur of the comic books. He almost never really had his mask on. He had his costume on occasionally. He would have ended up being a real person. He was developing a kind of family life. The episodes I really wanted to see were, like, The Tick goes to the family cookout at Arthur's house, where it's sort of like bringing your same-sex partner to your conservative family and try and keep everything in check. That's kind of where this show wanted to be, I think, is just like social issues, really, with occasionally something absurd and just puncture that more or less just mundane sphere. We were just like one foot too deeply in the cartoon and another foot being I think bitten off at the stump by money and corporate indifference."

"I just always thought that David (Burke) was perfect as Arthur," said Patrick Warburton about his co-star. "He did a fantastic job. Just recently I watched some of the shows again, I hadn't seen them in a long time, and I was reminded how perfect an actor David was. I really thought that he nailed that. He had such a likeable quality and there's something very real about his performance, and unquestioned and 100 percent committed to Arthur, that you really believe him as Arthur. I felt that as an actor he brought more to that role than could have potentially been the case. An actor could have stepped into that role and you very much would have gotten a sense that there was a guy playing Arthur. And with David, you just totally believed him as Arthur—you really believed it."

Playing Tick was no easy task for the active performer, who had to wear these insane $250,000 suits. They became only increasingly warmer and more uncomfortable under the set lights. There were subtle alterations made to the form-fitting suit after the pilot, as the seamless blue outfit was notoriously difficult for mobility and consumed buckets of time to wear. Yet for the good-natured Warburton, it remains one his favorite roles. He chimed, "I looked at it as an honor to play The Tick. I mean, The Tick is such a wonderful character. Did I enjoy wearing that rubber suit? I had to wear that rubber suit ten, twelve hours a day and you'd get kind of claustrophobic and miserable in that thing. I would have worn that suit for years if I'd had the opportunity. If that's the cross I've got to bear, then so be it. I loved being The Tick, I wanted to do that show and I had so much fun, it was so clever and just so well conceived."

The actor also said, "I didn't see The Tick as being one-dimensional because there were times that his anger might get to him or his frustration got to him or he was depressed, he was exuberant about something, and elated. He really kind of had the emotions of a child. Emotionally he could change just like that and almost go from tremendous joy to tears because he was labile like a child."

"What I loved about the [Tick] character," said Larry Charles, "was the ambiguity of it. You really did not know if The Tick was a madman or if he really was from somewhere else, or

Whether we want them or not, they're the only heroes we've got!

whether that was a costume or that was him. There were so many interestingly unanswered questions about him that I thought that it was kind of a meditation on consciousness in a way, like, 'What is real?', and I love that idea. I thought that it was a great post-modern deconstruction of a superhero. Which of course turned out to be its downfall when it finally came out, because it came out just after September 11th and I don't think the country was really ready for the deconstruction of a superhero at that time. they were sort of more craving a real superhero, you know?"

When the pilot aired on November 8, 2001, the weight of the tragic events of September 11 was a heavy burden. Network television had a hard time hitting viewers with the right tone in their programming. The show just got lost in the shuffle. If *Tick* failed, it wasn't because of lack of hard work—cast and crew gave it their all by working 14-hour days, six days a week. They never had a chance to keep it steady. Today, those in need of a good laugh can count on *The Tick: The Entire Series!* DVD to deliver a unique brand of the funny.

Sometime after the series ended, there were rumors and rumblings about the potential for a Tick full-length motion picture. The Tick film is something that Ben Edlund thinks about from time to time. Patrick Warburton stated, "Yeah. I know that Barry would like to make a Tick movie. He's talked about it, you know. So maybe they'll make a Tick movie one of these days, and maybe, maybe I'll be the lucky guy to play The Tick. Maybe I won't. Things change, perceptions change and maybe I'm not the right guy, but I had fun doing the TV show and I know we just scratched the surface with that. It'd be great to do a Tick movie and have a real budget, 'cause he's the greatest superhero of all time. If they do that, I hope I get a shot at it, but if I don't, I understand. I know how this business works."

Looking back, Larry Charles mentioned, "The show could have definitely lasted for a long time, yes. I mean, it had... Of course, there was so much ambiguity in the characters and so much conflict both within the characters and amongst the characters, that I felt it still had tremendous potential to go on for a long time. Because all the characters had sort of... all multi-dimensional characters, you know, they were cartoon characters. Sort of underground cartoon characters and they all had tremendous inner conflict and turmoil and angst and philosophical issues, and so I thought, yeah, this is a show we can explore a lot of interesting themes and the characters could continue to expand."

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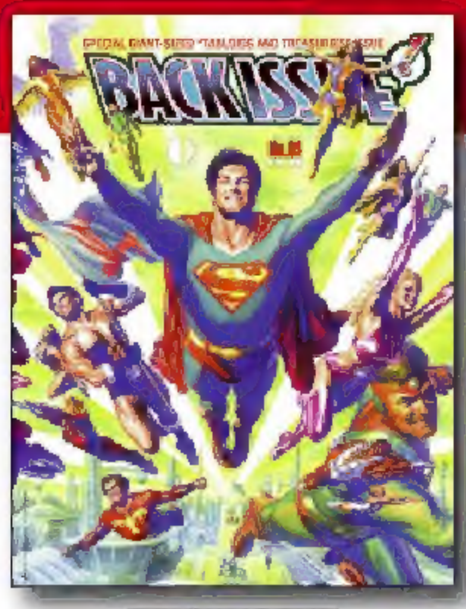

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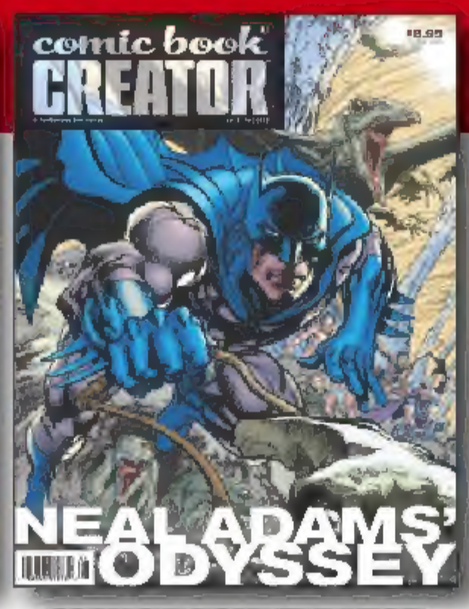

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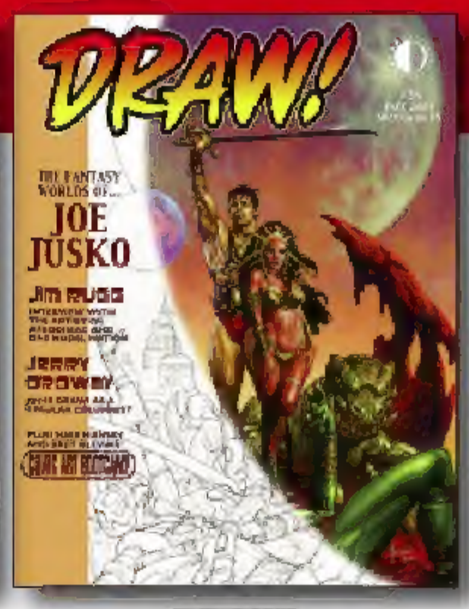

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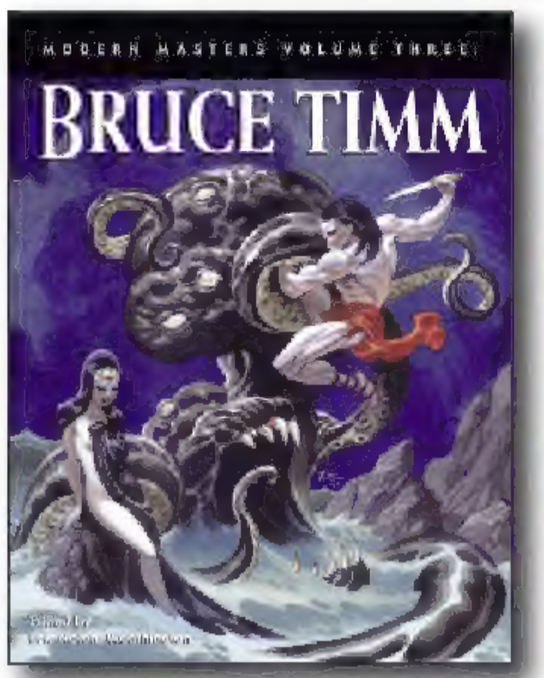

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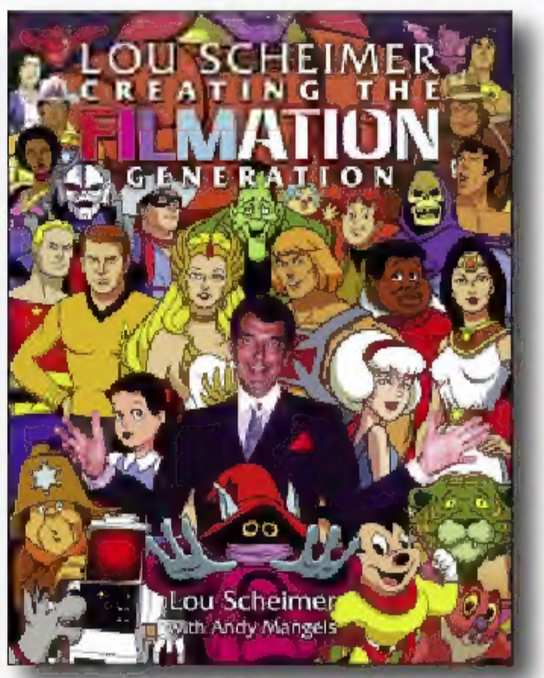

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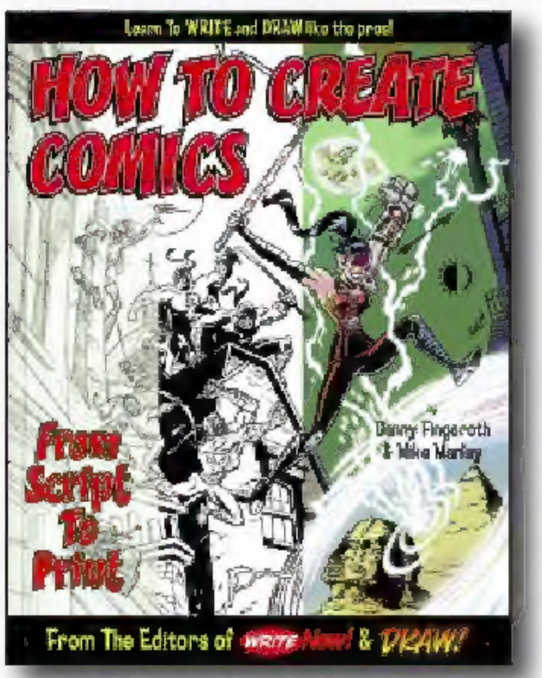
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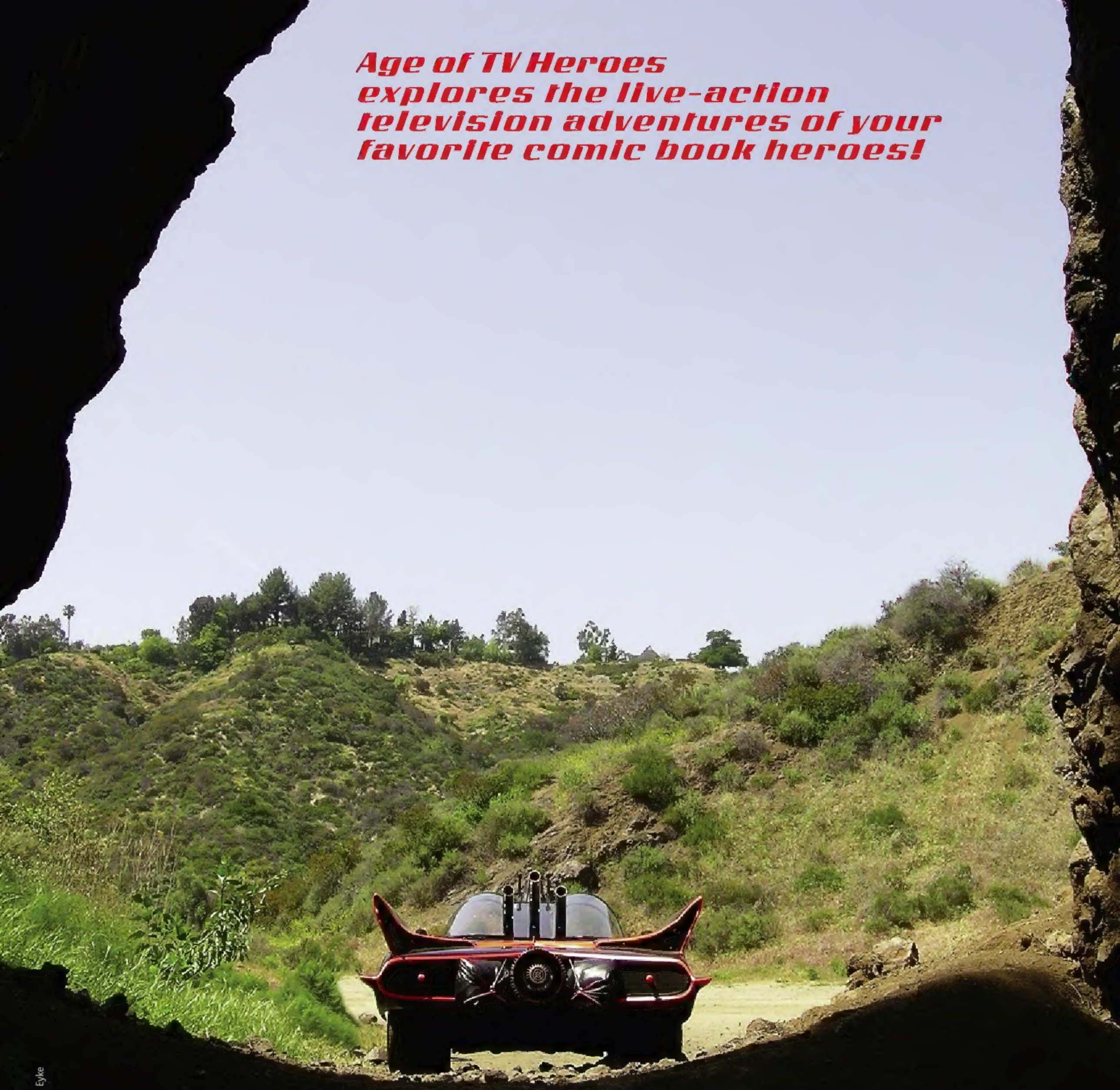

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